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JOHN AND I.

As knightly swords, of polished grain,
Are proven perfect when they bend—
True hearts may swerve, but in the end
Will right themselves and win again.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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JOHN AND I.

CHAPTER I.

I REMAINED standing where Hermine had left me, utterly unable to clear my thoughts—so great and awful seemed the ruin that hung over us. I think that I knelt down in that solitary room where Marie had resigned her boy for John's love, and prayed for her; but it is difficult for me to remember my thoughts or actions during that first half-hour. I know that my blood

boiled within me when I thought of those other two, whom I loved once, but must love no more. If a curse rose to my lips, may God have forgiven me!

At last, I resolved at any hazard to show John my heart that night.

His study was a small room on the second floor, which he had chosen on account of a low window, by which he could enter the garden without the trouble of descending into the courtyard. A narrow passage led from my own sitting-room below to his, and I chose that way. If I approached by the general corridor he might see me coming through the glass door of the study—he might refuse to admit me—and I was in no humour to be thwarted again.

Leaving my candle on the hall-table, I walked softly towards my brother's room.

The light inside showed me Hermine standing by John's side. They were very pale, very earnest, and his hand clasped hers.

My first impulse was to rush blindly, madly, towards them—to strike them down with my rage of indignation—to shame them into horror of their sin.

But I restrained myself. Some feeling—was it my love for Sophie and Marie?—forbade me from bringing to such shame a fair, young, loveable creature like Hermine. For him I felt no pity—but for that other feeling I think I could have struck him dead in my momentary frenzy. Yet, O God! how strangely old memories come upon us in moments like these! I recalled then an hour of early boyhood, when he,

child as he was, had rushed on his brother's assailant with clenched fists and flaming eyes.

I drew nearer. I could see their faces plainly. He was bending towards her, and speaking in a low tone. When she answered, her voice was clear and firm.

"I have thought of her," she said.

Their eyes met. I saw a light in Hermine's that I had never seen there before—a reflex of the swimming, overflowing tenderness of a woman's passionate love. That light, beautiful though it was, revealed to me a gulf of darkness opening at Marie's feet.

"Oh, it *must* be!—there is no other way," she whispered, in an agony of appeal. Slowly he withdrew his eyes from her face, he bent low over her hand, for some seconds

he held it to his lips. Without a word more she turned away, and hastened through the corridor.

I waited till I could not hear the rustle of her silks—till John had withdrawn his eyes from the way by which she had gone; then I fronted him fearlessly.

He looked stunned, helpless.

“I have writing to do, Hendy—whatever you have to say can surely wait till to-morrow. If you knew how tired and wretched I feel, you would have pity on me. I should go to bed, if lying awake, with ten thousand miseries to keep one awake, is not infinitely worse than being up.”

“I am up for the same reason. Do you think that I could sleep to-night, John?”

He evaded my question angrily.

"It is too bad that, when I am worried beyond human endurance, you should set on me too. Oh, Hendy, *will* you go?"

"No, I will not."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, say what you came to say, and have done with it. Every word you speak seems to split my head like an instrument of torture."

If it was torture for him to listen, it was no less torture for me to speak, when I looked on his working, ghastly face.

"I could not sleep to-night, John, because, for the first time in life, I feel that I cannot trust your honour."

"Good God, Hendy, you will drive me mad! Let me alone!—leave me, I say!"

He clutched my arm, as if he would have pushed me from the room. I was short by

his side, but had plenty of wiry strength, and resisted him.

“If I die for it, I will speak, John ; were it only for your own sake, perhaps I should suffer myself to be silenced by you—but she”—the words seemed to burn my throat, and my eyes were blind with hot tears—“but she, being so much nobler and purer, so wholly above you, and yet dependent on you——”

“I know that—I know that my name must henceforth be a curse in the family—I would live on bread and water all the days of my life to cancel the day which began this misery. I cannot cancel it now—I cannot undo what I have done—I can only spare her——”

“Spare her !” I cried, with cutting bitterness—“have you no more honest words to

me than those? There was a time, John, when you would have been too generous, too ingenuous, to cloak your sin under cover of virtuous self-forgetfulness. She will not require your pity—consideration such as yours is too humiliating for such a soul.”

The glare of his flashing eyes almost blinded me.

“Of whom do you speak?”

“Of one who stands as high above most women in her excellence, as you will fall below all true men in your infamy, if you entertain one treacherous thought towards your wife.”

He made a desperate effort at calmness, though his whole frame shook with agitation.

“You may come here as inquisitor, Hendy, but I will not confess to you. Before

God and my own conscience I feel acquitted—let it pass. You speak as if all the sin were mine, and none of the suffering. Ever since our marriage, has not Marie's unhappiness been mine—doubly mine, in fact, since I felt a remorse which she could never have. It is barbarous, besides unreasonable, of you to taunt me with a thought that is traitorous to her—for you, better than anyone, must know what my temptations have been. Have I not been tried as never man was tried? ”

“In God's name, John, do not seek to justify yourself; you might as well endeavour to show that black is white, as to prove that any temptations you may have had can in the smallest degree palliate you. If you ever loved Marie with one twentieth of the faithfulness and strength I gave

you credit for, you would scorn to name temptations, as I scorn to hear the word from your lips now."

His face grew livid; he trembled violently for a moment, then he planted himself before me with clenched fist and set teeth.

"Hendy, take warning. There should not be bad blood between us, and, if I struck you now, you might carry to your grave a mark that would separate me from you and your children as if a very hell were between us. Go, before it is done. If you speak again, you may be too late."

We stood face to face, looking at each other as we had never looked before—feeling that we were no longer brothers, no longer friends. Could we ever trust each other after our dark thoughts to-night?

Could I ever love him, when a love purer, stronger than ours had ever been, shut him out from my hearth and home—when a love, strong but impure, kept me and mine from him as a death-plague? Oh, no, we could never love as brothers love again. Our eyes and voices would henceforth be as those of strangers; our hands might touch, but never clasp in the warm way of brotherhood.

“You may kill me if you like,” I said, “but I will not stand by, whilst you plot against Marie’s happiness, without an effort to save her. Tell me——”

“Be silent, by God! or——”

I never knew what the last words were. The strong, straight blow came too soon for that—too soon for self-defence—flashing fire on to my brain, leaving a sick and

giddy darkness behind. I remember dimly to have fallen, to have felt a warm gush of blood from my brow — to have had this stream washed off by cold, careful hands—to have felt rather than known that it was my brother's hand that did this, my brother's hand that raised the wine to my lips, and put the lint on my forehead.

When the wine had moistened my parched throat I stood up, still faint but with returned consciousness—consciousness, oh heavens of unutterable suffering hanging over Marie's head, which I could not avert—consciousness of blood keeping off my brother's hand from me.

Without looking at each other we parted.

“Sophie dear,” I said to my poor frightened darling, “I have had a fall on the spiral staircase, and cut my forehead—it is

not much, my child, but let me be quite quiet, quite quiet—I cannot even bear your voice, my own Sophie.”

I did not undress, but threw myself on my bed, in a fever of suspense and agony. That night I shall never forget—by God’s mercy may I never live through such another! The extremest bodily pain would have been light in comparison with the anguish of those confused thoughts and that throbbing brain. Years have passed over my head since then—the locks that covered those beating, tortured brows are now grey, but the terrible suffering is palpable to me still, and I recall it with a cold shudder.

I remember also, with a thankfulness and a love too deep for tears, how through those hours of torment Sophie held my head on

her bosom, and never closed her eyes, even when daylight came. As the wife of my home—as the mother of my children—she has grown dearer with every year that has taken away somewhat of her youthful loveliness; but the remembrance of the sweet tenderness of my girlish bride will ever remain to me like some spring-flower pressed in a family Bible, recalling the freshness of the season in which it was gathered.

CHAPTER II.

I DID not unsay the story of my fall; could I have foreseen the events of the future, I should never have doubted, as I did then doubt, whether I was justified in such a subterfuge. Marie never knew that the scar on my forehead was caused by her husband's hand—no one, not even Sophie, knows it to this day. I thank God for it.

I rose early next morning; and first insisting upon Sophie taking a little rest, bathed and refreshed myself with the sweet

morning air at the open casement of the next room—my poor little woman sleeping as soundly as a child, before I had closed the bedroom door.

Sitting there, in that lonely tumult of pain and dread, I do not know how time passed; the clock struck twice, but I did not count the number of the strokes. I had not sufficient energy left to look at my watch.

The only thought over which I held mastery was this—what would be the end? I could see no hope.

A gentle tap at the door aroused me.

“May I come in?” said Marie, gently.

Her face was calm, though pale, and she started violently at sight of my bandaged temple.

“Oh, Hendy!—what is it?”

“A slip of the foot, and a fall on the iron banisters; a trifle not worth thinking of, dear Marie.”

I placed a seat for her, but she remained standing, and looked fixedly at me.

“I have brought a letter for you to read,” she said, in measured tones — “a pleasant surprise, truly, to find on one’s dressing-table after waking from good dreams.”

She smiled a bitter smile, that went to my heart. How brave the woman was, with all her love, all her weakness! I put out my hand slowly to take the letter.

The substance of it was the following:—

“My wife, the unhappy circumstances that I am about to narrate to you have decided me to leave Weiler to-morrow morning, and to follow Herr Roser to Ber-

lin, where, for a time at least, I shall take the directorship offered to me. Will you pardon me, Marie, that I leave without bidding you farewell? Think at least, dearest, that the resolution can cost me no less than it will cost you. I love you—I am true to you. God knows how unwillingly I may appear untrue. Yet, oh! my wife, if I had been wholly true to you, there might have been less in me that a noble woman could love—for with perfect strength there can be no temptation; and my faith has been sorely tried. I am faithful. Can I say more without throwing a shadow on one who is of your own flesh and blood—good God! whose eyes are so like yours, Marie? If I show myself to have been immaculate, should I not prove her to be unworthy of your love? Never

blame her; never think that she has done anything for which her mother might blush. Be kind and tender to her; for I know that she suffers. My heart is torn with anguish; but in all my deep sorrow at leaving you, I am in some measure soothed by the thought that you will never doubt my love—that you will feel I have acted for the best. I could not take you from her, when she, if ever, needed a mother's love and tenderness—I could not remain and feel that I had exiled both your children. Pardon me, oh! pardon me, dearest love of my heart, that I make you suffer so. Whatever I do, whichever path I turn, I see that I cannot avoid causing you inexpressible sorrow; but through all you will believe in me, you will love me—in this I find consolation. Though I am so wretched that I could sob like a

child, I look forward to our meeting in happiness hereafter. Hermine will meet me as a friend or brother; I shall look upon her face, and never think it fair, but as it reminds me of her mother; we will have no more partings. And that other meeting—when Carl is with us, who shall be so happy as my wife?

“I did not know that Hermine loved me till that day on which we were reconciled. I had not known till then that my heart could be false to you in a thought only. From that time I ceased to be cold to her; I felt so strong in my own strength that I did not think the very heavens could move me; I resolved to be brotherlike and easy to her, in such a way that no other and ignobler thoughts could taint us for a moment. When I found that I could no longer trust myself, I came to the deter-

mination to leave Weiler and save her. God knows that I never endeavoured to inspire her with love for me ; what harm I did I did unwittingly, and repent of with the bitterest self-contempt and self-reproach. I hardly know what I say, Marie ; the light burns into my brain, and I feel as if every word were forced from me by some subtle torture. Am I leaving you ? Is it true that I am signing my own death-warrant ? God help me, Marie !—pray for me. I think if I doubted your faith in me, I should go mad. I have watched you in your sleep, but I did not dare even to touch your lips with mine—yet I am leaving you ! Dear, be strong for my sake ; do not weep too much—yet I am weeping like a woman as I write. I can write no more. Oh ! wife, oh ! love, forgive me !”

I stood as one in a dream. He had gone alone. My first passion of wounded affection and ardent championship, on Marie's behalf, had caused me to magnify the evil in imagination. True, that the sin might be the same in the spirit, in the letter the difference was wide. Thank God, Hermine was not henceforth irrevocably barred out from her place among true women. My sister's hearth had not been shamelessly violated in the eyes of the world. I almost scorned myself for this thought; yet cannot the world and its opinions greatly influence a woman's life for happiness or misery?

"He is gone, then—the worst has not come, Heaven be praised for it!"

The words escaped me involuntarily, but Marie caught them up with a glow of anger.

"You knew of this—you knew and con-

cealed it from me! I should as soon have expected the stars to fall as that you should prove traitor to me, Hendy!"

"Marie, be calm—think for one moment. Do you utter the honest thoughts of your heart when you say such words to *me*? Granted that my eyes may have been opened only two days ago to the great, great sorrow hanging over your head—granted that I tried to avert the knowledge of that sorrow and the suffering of it from you, from you, dear, whom I love so well—and if I failed, oh! Marie, it needed a braver heart than mine to tell you of my failure in such a cause."

Her face melted. Her poor trembling hand sought mine, her lips bent over it.

"Good true heart," she muttered brokenly, "would to God you had no brother!—I could love you better then."

“Those are hard words, Marie—think of his remorse, his exile, his youth; your heart must relent to him by-and-bye—he has proved himself unworthy of you, but he may yet redeem the fault for which he will pay so heavily.”

She looked at me with a strange mournful wistfulness.

“Do you know me so little, Hendy?” and then taking his letter from my hands, she tore it into a hundred fragments, and trod upon them.

“Are you answered now?—oh! let me do it without words, dear Henderson; it is a bitter, bitter task to rail against one we have loved.”

Something in her look, something in her voice, forbade me to speak, much as I yearned to speak in my brother's defence

then. No one could feel more forcibly how deeply he had hurt the delicatest feelings of Marie's nature—no one could condemn him more than I did—but oh! it was a cruel thing on that summer morning to feel these two were to be parted for ever, and make no blind effort to join their hands.

“Mother!”

Hermine had approached ere we were aware of it, and stood on the threshold, not daring to enter. Was she beautiful in my eyes as she stood there, supplicating with no language but that of agonized, humiliated looks? Her cheeks were flushed and sunken from much weeping, her blue eyes had lost their arch brilliancy, her hair was tossed from her brow, and fell heavily around her throat. The grace, the sparkling naïveté, the mobile power of expression,

were wanting utterly in the Hermine I saw before me, but her beauty never touched me so much as it did now.

“Oh! mother, let me come in, let me speak to you!—I must speak to you, mama!”

Words failed; but all the self-reproach, all the sharp agony, was written in her face. Marie pressed her hands before her eyes, and answered rapidly, but without hardness:

“I forgive you, Hermine, as I stand before God, I forgive you; but you must leave me, you must not hurt me any more. I remember all that I have done to set against this, your cruel wrong; perhaps I have been equally cruel to you—I do not know—I think I can have been like no other mother, no other woman, or I should never be stung so sharply by other women.

Go, go, forgive me where I have made you suffer—forgive me if you can—be happy. Hendy will not forsake you, he will see you and counsel you—I never can—I am not necessary to you—do not call me mother again.”

Hermine was too wretched to be proud now. With a sudden impulse she threw herself at Marie’s feet.

“Mama, I do not deserve pardon—I know that. I know that henceforth the very hem of my dress will pollute the floor on which you walk. I know that I must never again kiss Hendy’s wife, though I love her; but because I am fallen so low in the ranks of women, because since I have wept so, I am past all shame, I kneel before you, mother (and before you, Henderson, though I was proud before), to show you my heart.

Unwomanly, shameless, wicked, as I have been, I bare my thoughts to you without a shudder, since, if I am silent, *he* will suffer for my sin. Mama, *I will* speak, if you spurn me with your foot, I will speak. It was all my doing. He was generous, and he blamed himself in his endeavour to spare me; he does not love me—he has never loved me. Though I love him, so that I go from Weiler and feel as if I could die gladly, die gladly in my youth and in the summer time, yet I thank Christ that I can kneel before you and avow my loneliness. He has never loved me—his heart is as true to you as it was on your wedding-day. He was so good, so generous, that he went to spare me—let me tell you everything—let me justify him to you, mama."

“He wants no justification, Hermine; had he wanted one, he would have remained to justify himself,” said Marie coldly.

“No, no,” cried the unhappy girl, with burning tears, “you must not shut your heart against him, mama—by-and-bye you will be happy again.”

A stream of angry light shot from Marie’s eyes, like a sword that’s suddenly unsheathed.

“Hermine, whatever you say henceforth must be without any reference to *him*. Whether you speak of the past or of the future, that name must be blotted out from my life. He is no longer my husband—I am no longer his wife; we are dead to each other, and I trample on the grave of his memory, as I trample upon these stones now. I have no more respect for him than

for the worms which they cover. Henderson, I love you, but never more as his brother ; if you have a child who bears his name, I shall love him less than your other children ; if you try at any future time to mediate between us, tried friend, only friend that you are, I must lose you utterly, remember that. Though I know that your mind is firm as granite in the right, and that your heart is tender and simple as a woman's, I must nevertheless lose you, if you try to bring us together. We are dead—we are buried—and our graves lie miles and miles apart. Let them be in peace, Hendy."

Hermine's head sank lower and lower, her golden hair strewed the ground, her tears wetted Marie's feet.

"Oh, mama, will you be so cruel to him,

when he loves you? Hear me before I go, I am lonely and miserable, and am leaving you for ever—will you refuse me this, mother?”

“I will kiss you, Hermine—I will see you sometimes, and I could not make such a promise unless I forgave you. Do not ask any more of me—do not make me more unhappy than I am.”

She stooped and raised the drooping head. With a firm but gentle hand she put off the long damp locks from her forehead. Then she looked at her sadly and earnestly.

“May you be happy enough to forget me, Hermine—can I say more than that?” And she kissed her.

Never shall I forget that parting. The meeting did not come for many years after.

CHAPTER III.

THE morning passed slowly and wearily. Marie shut herself in her room—Sophie assisted Hermine in packing. I had no consolation or employment, and tried vainly to read or write with clearness. Women often bear domestic troubles better than men, because they can find some mechanical work to do in the house ; a mere student is utterly at the mercy of his books or ideas.

Everything went on as usual. Marie gave her orders to the Amtmann without a

tremor, and counted out the forester's wages unfalteringly. I noticed that John's cigar-case, portrait, and books were removed from the white drawing-room; I noticed, also, that she wore no wedding-ring. Hermine left early—she did not ask my advice—she did not name her plans to me; she merely said at parting, "You will find me at Aunt Carline's." When I proposed to accompany her in the carriage to Ludwigsburg, she negatived my offer almost haughtily.

"It cannot be any pleasure to you, Hendy, and I absolve you from all duties of friendship or pity towards me. You are very good, but you must always think badly of me—let me learn to act alone."

The dinner was served up with its usual simple stateliness, and when it was over—or rather the form of it, for no one could eat—

we adjourned as usual into the alcoved room for coffee. But it was a dreary, dreary deceit. We were all miserable, and would have been less so without this mockery.

A long walk to the village bridged over the space from dinner to supper, and we returned at seven o'clock, thankful that the day was over.

Meantime, my engagement was made to return to Carline on the morrow. Would Marie let me go without a word more of confidence? As I looked on her white face I thought that any out-speaking of grief, however wild, must be a relief, and I felt as if I could not leave her till the relief came. The supper was no less of a form than the dinner. Heinrich, who, poor faithful fellow, thought Suabia all the world, and his mistress queen of it, kept glancing anxiously

at the beautiful grief-stricken face, as if wishing, yet not daring, to speak one word of sympathy. He lingered, too, over his duties, gave us an extra dish of sweets, pretended that the wine was of a wrong vintage and must be changed, made dilatory advance in clearing away, and blundered with trembling hands among the coffee-cups. At last his emotion overcame all sense of respect; throwing down his pile of serviettes on the floor, he covered his face with his hands and burst into tears.

“Heinrich,” Marie said gently, “what is this?”

The good honest soul stood, still blubbering like a child.

“Have you been doing wrong, Heinrich? Speak—am I so hard a mistress that you fear to confess to me?”

And Marie tried to smile, though the smile did not come.

“My gracious lady—my poor sweet mistress—I am only a poor man, and your butler, but I have served you with my best endeavour—and may I—may I—oh, dear lady, forgive me, but I cannot see that your heart is breaking without feeling as if mine would break too.”

He leaned on the back of a chair, not daring to look at his mistress—not daring to look at any of us, whilst his broad shoulders shook with sobs. Marie’s face changed, but she spoke to him calmly.

“Look up, Heinrich! Here, take my hand. You are a good faithful servant, and I shall not easily forget that you love me. We must all have troubles, Heinrich ;

we must bear them with our own strength, but we are always helped by sympathy. Leave off crying, and tell me that you can keep your tears for my eyes only."

He bowed low over her hand, and kissed it fervently.

"Trust me, gracious lady! I know my mistress, and my place too well, to stoop to be vulgar and gossiping. May the Holy Virgin bless my lady!"

"Poor fellow!" said Marie, when he was gone, "he has often lied, and often stolen, but loves me truly through all. I believe he would murder any one who insulted me!"

She said no more, though it was evident that this incident had touched her deeply. Indeed, she appeared so resolved upon self-conquest, that I feared the effort might

touch her brain ; for none can tell who have not experienced it the wearing misery of a secret despair—and despair was written on her face. I tried by various stratagems to get her to speak of what had happened—talked of Hermine, of Carl, of the Rosers, of Sophie's future and mine—lastly, of her own.

“You must write to us often, dear Marie; you must tell us of your pursuits, of your books, your parishes, and your farming.”

“Don't speak of them, Hendy. I cannot bear to think of the loneliness before me,” and she shuddered ; “the long summer days and the nights that follow. It is dreadful!”

“But, my sister,” I urged, “will you let me go from you without one hope for another and brighter summer, perhaps to

follow this, certainly to come to you sooner or later, if you will accept it."

She turned away her face hastily.

"Your holidays will always make me happier, dear Hendy; and if I live long enough, I shall have my boy again. My eyes are not strong, but I shall try to look so far forward when I am most lonely."

"Marie, it is impossible for you to misunderstand me. I give you my word of honour never to try to mediate between you and *him*; but you must hear from me to-day what I should never forgive myself if I left unsaid."

"Yourself?" she cried, catching up my words, with irritation; "and to whom would you feel wanting in duty by such an omission—to your sister, or to the man who has proved an unfaithful husband to her?"

“To my sister first, because her happiness is nearest to my heart—because she is so good and so pure, that I love her with a reverence too deep to express in words; to my brother next, because, though he has sinned, his happiness is near to my heart; because, though he is faulty and imperfect, though he is impetuous for evil as for good, I know that he is worthy of being loved, as many other imperfect men and women are worthy of being loved—and I love him, Marie.”

Her back had been turned upon me hitherto, but she moved nearer, with slow steps, as if half glad, half unwilling to hear the words.

“You clear him, Hendy?”

“I love him,” I replied, “and true love accepts atonement.”

“How can we reason together? I, a woman and his wife—you, a man and his

brother? There is so wide a difference between the two relations, Hendy, that even you, with your gentle and delicate feelings, cannot bridge it over—you cannot know what it is for a woman to have her love, her home, her honour, violated.”

“Perhaps not,” I replied sadly, “for men are seldom worthy of the sweet purity and tenderness of good women—but do not shrink from me, Marie, I know how our love (so often faulty, at best imperfect and selfish), can call forth the faultless, self-forgetting love of the woman we take to our hearts; and I know, Marie—oh, rest your head on my shoulder and weep, dear—I know that your heart is breaking.”

The mockery of composure was thrown aside now—she could no longer deceive herself—she could no longer deceive us.

“I loved him so!” she cried; and, falling on my breast, the woman’s brave strength gave way. May it never be my lot to witness such grief again! Nothing I could say had power to soothe her for an instant. Even Sophie’s childlike caresses elicited no word. We could only support her slender frame, which shook as if it would break beneath the fit of sobbing; for more than an hour she sobbed in this way—then she laid her head on Sophie’s bosom, as if she were dying.

“Let Sophie and me carry you upstairs, dearest Marie, you must try to sleep, for our sakes.”

“I can walk, brother, I am much better now.”

She rose to her full height and walked a few steps firmly, but on a sudden she

screamed and put her hand to her heart. I caught her as she staggered, and then I saw that her lips were dyed with blood. She had broken a blood-vessel!

CHAPTER IV.

“Es kostet ein Geld,” said the Colonel reflectively, and lighted his cigar by way of sermonizing in smoky thoughtfulness on the text evoked.

It costs one money. The attentive reader will not have failed to observe how much this maxim was esteemed by my uncle; indeed, I may call it the guiding rule of his life, and of that of hundreds of old-fashioned German gentlemen like him. *It costs one money*, whether you eat of every

soup and savoury at a tenpenny *table d'hôte*, or whether you taste of only the beef and the broth in which it has been boiled—therefore my uncle never failed to get out his tenpennyworth in limitless quantities of soup, flesh, and fowl—not to speak of pancakes and gingerbread nuts. It costs but one money, whether you treat your friends to coffee and fruit *kuchen* at home, or whether you treat them to coffee and ices at a *café*; but the latter arrangement has the advantage of allowing the servant a holiday, by which *her* tea is spared; so the Herr Oberst generally gave his wife half-a-crown when he was in a good temper, saying, magnanimously, “Take your friends to Marguandt’s *café*, my wife, and treat them like a princess.” It might be a question of hiring a servant, of going out for the bathing season,

of dining at Cannstatt on Sunday, or of keeping at home—"Es kostet ein Geld" was always the first consideration. If discussion proved that, of two arrangements, one did *not* cost the same money, no member of the family ever thought of throwing in a vote for the extra expenditure, however great the temptation. It was an imprudence unheard of in the Blum annals.

I think it would be no small comfort to many of our fathers and husbands in England if the same providential maxim were equally well studied.

On the occasion of which I speak, my uncle had been lecturing Sophie and myself on the expediency of hiring apartments with attendance, and of having our meals sent in from a restaurant.

"You can get a portion and half of six-

penny dinner, my children," he had said, "which is not bad, and in great plenty; or you can get a portion and a half of shilling dinner, which is right superb—soup, cutlet, salads, fritters—in fact, it is a feast, quite equal to our mess-table when I served in the cavalry. You surely don't desire to exceed the excellence of an officer's mess?"

Sophie of course acquiesced; I said nothing, which answered as well, and leaving the Colonel in fuming felicity by the side of his wife, we set off to Cannstatt in search of lodgings. Hermine had written to us on the day of our arrival in Stuttgart, saying that Cannstatt was decided upon by Carline in lieu of remaining all summer at Wildbad; finally, that they would join us there in the course of a day or two.

I divined at once the influence at work.

After Hermine's voluntary humiliation in returning to her, Carline, I knew, would be ready to move the heavens in order to keep her favourite. Carline's pride had been flattered so deeply, that she would be quite a tool in Hermine's hands now ; and bitter and angry as my feelings could but be towards the young girl who had caused so much suffering, I knew that I might trust to her power being used on Marie's behalf. The letter lifted a great weight from my heart. Though Wildbad was within a few hours' journey from Weiler, those few hours must divide us from Marie utterly. And she still looked so feeble and broken, that I almost felt at parting as if we were never to meet again.

Her life had hung upon a thread for five days after the breaking of the blood-vessel ;

twice indeed we despaired, but extreme care and quiet, added to an elasticity of strength often characterizing a frail physique, restored her, though but a shadow of her former self. During the period of danger, three letters arrived from John, which I withheld till she recovered sufficient strength to read them.

When I placed them in her hands she looked at me with sad reproach.

“Hendy, why not let me wake to realities and brave them? It is better that he should leave me in peace, as he found me. I may in time learn to be happy; I shall never do so whilst these wretched reminders are forced upon me. He has showed unfaithfulness, and a thousand letters or repentances can never undo *that*.”

She broke the seals with fluttering fin-

gers ; then, as if fearful to trust herself, she put them back, saying earnestly :—

“I would rather live a long life of complete loneliness, dear Hendy, than accept a protection, or a love imposed by duty. He may be remorseful and unhappy, but he cannot love me truly ; I am too proud, I have suffered too much, to be consoled by pity, or by any show of affection—the faithful following of a dog were more endurable than pity or duty from him, Hendy.”

What could I do with that pleading face before me ? How could I persuade her when I doubted myself ? How could I help doubting ? And Marie was not a woman to be easily reasoned with. Her own nature was so true, her standard of truth so high, that she could not tolerate a shadow of falseness in others—she could not bring

herself to believe in excellence which was tainted even by a thought of disloyalty. The letters were burnt at once.

We should have parted with Marie even more regretfully had we not left the sacred charge of her health to Ottilie. The dear girl readily, indeed joyfully, consented to take Sophie's place—for she loved Marie with a worship that I have often seen testified by young girls to beautiful, sensitive women, and which I can hardly account for, except by the fact that beauty and goodness generally attract each other magnetically. To sit by Marie, and hold one of her thin hands, to kneel at her feet in twilight times and look up into her sad eyes, to be permitted to pour out her medicines, to dress her hair, to arrange her cushions—

these were esteemed dear and sweet privileges, and made Ottilie quite happy.

My first business on arriving in Stuttgart was to call upon Herr Roser, in compliance with instructions received from Marie. The task was a painful one, and I was anxious to have it over.

The good old couple received me cordially: one glance told me that Marie's trouble had been already made their own; for, after our first greeting, both sat down, looking silent and nervous, and evidently anxious to hear my disclosure, though dreading it.

"I hardly know how to begin the information with which I am charged to you, Herr Roser."

"A little explanation would certainly relieve our minds," replied the banker, with an uneasy smile; "in these matters, dear

Herr Professor, as you, with your large philosophical attainments, will quite understand—in these matters Kant and other great authorities agree in pardoning the moral duties for usurping the place of the moral affections; we would fain reverse the order—live, in fact, as skeleton intellectualities—but our humanities pull at our coat-tails too vigorously.”

“Is Marie well?—have you heard from her husband?” anxiously asked the good Frau, getting impatient at the banker’s ill-timed philosophy.

“My sister is recovering slowly from a great shock she has lately received.”

“Yes, we can understand *that*,” said the little old lady; “but is there nothing better to tell us of?—no happy settlement?”

“None—none!”

“And no explanation?” put in Herr Roser, looking at me inquiringly. “I am sorry, Herr Professor, that I feel obliged to lay a good deal of blame upon your brother. Such a course was, to say the least of it, unjustifiable, entailing, as it must do, serious inconvenience and unpleasantness upon all parties concerned.”

“I am not come here to defend my brother, Herr Roser—you can speak plainly without apology. I feel as deeply as your words can tell me, the amount of folly, blame, and injury for which he is accountable. I feel, also, that the wrong, both as regards himself and her, is irremediable—utterly irremediable.”

“That is a hard word, Herr Professor—even such complicated discomforts, not to say grievances, that his proceeding has

necessarily caused me, have not brought me to use such a word. I hope you are deceived in the necessity of it."

"No," I said, and blurted out the whole ugly truth with an effort. "He has done wrong, and he must suffer the consequences of it. A separation for life is unavoidable between the Baroness and her husband. Marie asks of your friendship that his name may never be mentioned by you again."

The old lady burst into tears.

"I said it would be so," she murmured to herself; "I always thought the English marriage would turn out unluckily. My poor dear Marie, my sweet child, thou wert not born under the star of good husbands; and yet the men are always running after thee, for thy beauty and thy bad husband's money, my pretty Marie."

“You surprise me!—you astonish me!—you amaze me!” cried the banker; “and, pray, Herr Professor, do you consider such a separation justifiable?”

“If my sister judges it to be so for her happiness, can I do otherwise?”

He fidgeted a little.

“I knew there had been a misunderstanding, from what he said to me on his arrival at Berlin; and I pitied him, poor fellow—for he could eat nothing, though I had ordered the most delicious hare and quince cream for supper—a man must be in a bad state of mind indeed when he cannot be tempted by hare or quince cream—but I was utterly, utterly taken aback by this last step of his.”

“You must understand the step to have been taken by the Baroness,” I said.

“If I understand you rightly, then, it was in compliance with the Baroness’s wishes that your brother left Berlin last week?”

I was struck dumb.

“Of course I could pardon my dear friend the Baroness for an ill-advised judgment, as ladies are not expected to be like men of business, but it is unlike her to interfere in things she knows nothing about; and——”

“John has left Berlin?”

“I see, my dear Herr Professor,” continued the banker, “that we have been very far from understanding each other. It is most illogical to make propositions when our terms are uncertain, but we have fallen into that very error. Your facts are, that, owing to some delicate affair in which we

will not meddle, my dear friend the Baroness has had—shall I call it a collision?—with her husband.”

“And they have separated!—and he was so handsome and pleasant a gentleman!—oh dear, dear!” cried the good Frau, weeping bitterly.

“My brother is gone, then?”

“I am sorry to say that he has taken that most unwarrantable step, thereby doing injury to himself in his capacity of deputy-director to our firm, and injury to ourselves, by putting us in sudden need of his talents when they were most desirable to us.”

“Then my errand is useless,” I replied, sadly; “I had come, Herr Roser, to beg, on Marie’s part, that under no circumstances would you communicate with her regarding

him—that you, in fact, will respect her resolve upon a separation.”

A long philosophical tirade followed from the banker, which was interrupted by the occasional ejaculatory prayers and soliloquies of his wife, and then I took leave.

So John had lost himself to us utterly! Whither he had directed his steps was beyond our reach now; Marie need fear no intercessions on the part of those who loved him.

When I thought of his impressible character, his readiness to please and to be pleased, his ease in adapting himself to circumstances, I could not think that his life would be very unhappy for more than a year or two. But there are worse evils than unhappiness. Better that he were dead than that he should take pleasure in

vicious company or in vicious pursuits. I have often thought that it is good for some sort of men to have wives of characters less firm and well-toned than their own; the feeling of being looked up to, worshipped, and revered, incites them to a desire of still greater worthiness for such homage; they feel more security and peace in the possession of one whose standard of excellence cannot go beyond themselves, who has no aspirations and sympathies in which they do not share. John might have been a happy and self-respected man with a pretty, loving, silly creature who would make her husband the whole world; but under those circumstances he could never have risen beyond his original self. Had no shadow come over his married life with Marie, many noble qualities, which are often

potential in men of his stamp, might have developed themselves. Alas! my brother, how bitterly must you pay for all that you have lost!

Nothing could equal the coldness of Hermine's greeting, or the cordiality of Carline's; as to Carl, he followed me everywhere, shaking his curls in glee, as a loving dog wags his tail. Carline forbore to comment upon the separation of John and Marie in my hearing, and I strictly avoided a *tête-à-tête* with her, for an exultant look or word would have exasperated me, perhaps beyond all endurance. It was bad enough to see that glitter in her dark eyes, which told the terrible tale of gratified hate. Bah!—and the woman almost fascinated me into liking her, with her soft sympathetic looks and slippery

words. How I wished that she had been coarse, and ungraceful, and ugly!

Poor Carl! I had need of all my influence to counteract the bad teaching of his life. Young, ardent, impulsive, as he was, how could he withstand the poisonous atmosphere which he breathed? The unnatural persecution of his mother by Carline, her diseased fondness for himself, Marie's unfortunate marriage, John's disappearance—all these circumstances conspired to fill his mind with vague suspicions of the goodness and durability of people and things. He would ask me such questions as brought the tears to my eyes when I looked on his innocent brow and childish lips. He would wake up at night, and come to my bedside, pale and distressed.

“Dear Mr. Brown, I cannot sleep for

thinking of mama. I feel as if I ought to seek all over the world till I find Mr. John, and kill him for breaking mama's heart, and then—and then, Aunt Carline says mama is not a good woman, or she would never have married him—and I seem to be equally wrong in loving her as in hating Mr. John—what am I to do ? ”

Poor boy ! it was the unhealthiest education possible for a nature so sensitive and so impetuous as his, and I could only oppose it by stimulating him to more ardent study, to severer out-door exercise, and to a plentiful recreation of wholesome fictions and holiday treats. Many a time one of Marryat's or Cooper's exciting stories turned his mind to a sunny mood, and Schiller's glorious ballads seldom failed of the same good effect. Neither were amusements

wanting. Three times a week he attended the Gymnasium for drilling lessons, after which he joined the other boys in a good rough game; then we had a hearty laugh at the puppet-theatre on Sunday evenings, in the bath gardens; a really good opera or tragedy at the Royal Opera House occasionally; besides riding, fencing, and shooting, not to speak of lessons on the piano and guitar, which were always treats.

Nothing could be simpler or more regular than our life at Cannstatt. We rose at six, then walked to the public bath and bathed, breakfasted at seven, worked till one; at that hour Sophie always met me in the dining room, when we sat down to the shilling *table d'hôte*, with perhaps fifty visitors, many of whom were known to us, dined superbly off a many-coursed dinner, chatting with

our neighbours all the while—after which everyone adjourned for coffee to the gardens, where we were seldom alone, unless we liked. An hour or two's reading with Carl, and a stroll in the park or gardens with my wife, finished the day. An easy, cheerful life is that of the German *Badezeit*. No pomp, no pretension, no jealousies—all is smooth urbanity and simple enjoyment.

One evening, about three weeks after our arrival, as we were sitting in the Park, Sophie and I, enjoying, in a most Darby and Joan fashion, the pleasant smell of fresh foliage and the pleasant sight of happy crowds, Carl rushed up to us, flushed and trembling with excitement.

“I have seen him!—I have seen him!” was all he could say for his terror and his haste.

“Take breath, and then speak, Carl. Whom have you seen?”

The boy made a great effort to calm himself, but failed.

“I have seen him!” he cried, between convulsive bursts of tears and panting—“I have seen Mr. John, down there by the statuary, and I went up to him and struck him at once—so, and said, ‘How dare you come near us when you have done mama so much harm!’ But he did not return the blow, which made me afraid to strike again—it would have been cowardly. He looked at me as *you* look at me, Mr. Brown, when you are too vexed to scold—and then he went away. Oh! I would give anything if I had not struck him—but I thought of mama, and felt enraged.”

“Which way did he go, Carl?”

“That way—towards Cannstatt. Oh! Mr. Brown, may I go after him to say how sorry I am?”

I was too bewildered to answer Carl then. Why had John come to Cannstatt?—whom did he seek? Could Hermine be so utterly lost to maidenly shame as to keep up any sort of communication with him?—and to what end could such a communication lead but to the very worst? The contemplation of it filled me with horror and loathing. Was John really unfaithful to his wife?—was he really unworthy of pardon and compassion from us?

Without waiting to think longer, I begged Carl to calm himself, and to trust that I would act for the best. Leaving him to return with Sophie by the crowded walk, I struck into a side path which led me in two

minutes to the road, and here I had no difficulty in finding a drosky. I was, therefore, in Cannstatt before John could fairly have reached the outskirts of the Park. This advantage was something: it would at least enable me to prevent Hermine from meeting him, or would give me the power of knowing her guilt. My first step was to proceed to Carline's house, and ask for the Fräulein Hermine.

“The Fräulein is out, mein Herr; it is nearly an hour since she joined some ladies for coffee in the Bath gardens. Most probably you will find her there.”

I turned away impatiently, and was soon threading my way between the coffee tables in the garden. Hermine's white dress and shining hair immediately caught my eye; she did not observe me, as I approached her

sideways, and I had an opportunity of studying her face. Certainly the expression I read there betokened no expectation or nervousness. Never had she seemed more self-possessed, more indifferent, more inclined to a supercilious enjoyment of coffee and quizzing.

Not wishing to be seen, I took possession of an unoccupied seat in a little summer-house immediately behind the crowded tables, and there waited patiently to see what the end might be.

Sometimes I could catch the sound of Hermine's quick, clear voice, as she caricatured the passers-by, to the infinite delight of her companions, who were ladies of no uncommon type—shy, insipid, and satirical in heart, if not in words. To such, Hermine was always the most charming of com-

panions, since she cut into clear shape, thoughts that they dared not, and could not, express themselves.

Presently one of them, more by a gesture and a look than by words, called Hermine's attention to a slight, good-looking man in the distance. She glanced in the direction pointed to her, then her eyes fell and her colour came.

John, for it was he, advanced slowly towards the groups of coffee drinkers, looking hither and thither, as if in search of something he dreaded to find. Soon he perceived Hermine, and then, as if irresolute whether to come forward or return, he stood still with averted face.

Suddenly, as I have seen men of the fire-brigade dilate their eyes to bear the full force of the scorching flame, his eyes sought

hers with a dazed, daring look, the hardness and the despair melted from his face, the indifference and coldness from hers, and over both fell a softness, a tenderness, and a mystery, which made me blush to think that even for Marie's sake I could stoop to be a spy upon them.

In a minute all was over. Hermine's white hands resumed her knitting, her raillery sparkled brightly as before; except for a tremulous thread of colour on either cheek, the meeting had in no wise changed her outwardly. But I was not to be easily deceived now. That John's presence moved the inmost depths of her soul—that some secret purpose impelled him to see her—that an understanding still existed between them—all this remained beyond doubt. Hermine once convicted of so

wicked, so shameless a deceit, I saw no clear course before me but to expose her to Carline. Much as I shrank from such an alternative, I felt that anything would be better than the infamy and wretchedness averted by it.

By-and-bye a Kellner approached with a tray of ices. There was nothing singular in this, or in the fact that he should go up to Hermine for further orders. But Hermine was not a country pastor's daughter, who could hardly speak to a waiter without blushing, and yet, as the man stooped down and said a few words to her in a low voice, she coloured to the roots of her hair, and answered him with a visible effort.

John wished to make an assignation with her, and this Kellner was his emissary.

As soon as the ices were finished, the

party rose. Hermine took the lead, holding the arm of the youngest lady, whom I knew to be the one of all Carline's acquaintances least objectionable to her. They followed in a homeward direction, Hermine, every now and then, looking nervously round, as if with a fear of being watched.

Now was the time to show myself; for certainly I was more terrible to Hermine when an open enemy than I could be as a secret spy, since meanness on the right side is often apt to engender contempt on the wrong.

Bowing to her companions, I placed myself by her side with a very bare show of courtesy.

"I daresay you know, Hermine, whom I am seeking," I said, coldly.

She drew away from her companion's

arm, and answered in a low, hurried voice—

“Why do you seek him?—what good can such a meeting do? I know you would kill him, if he were not too noble to defend himself!”

“Hermine, is it becoming in you to speak so to me? Consider one moment which is the worst crime—to defend a good woman’s honour, even by shedding of blood, or to drive a dagger slowly, surely, into that woman’s heart? It is not proved that I have any intention of avenging Marie to the death—it *is* proved that you are bent upon poisoning her life—poisoning her life, Hermine, with the cruelest, slowest torture.”

She winced.

“You are large-hearted enough where mama is concerned; you are hard and unfeeling as these stones towards me. Look

at my wrist? — is that blue-veined, bony arm at all like the arm of a happy young girl? Do you not see how hollow my cheeks have grown, and what dark circles have risen round my eyes? You will not believe me if I tell you that the suffering which has caused this change is unselfish — if I swear to it, you will not believe. It is true, nevertheless. Mama's wretchedness can hardly equal mine, since hers is un-mixed with remorse."

"Remorse! — remorse, Hermine!" and I laughed bitterly.

"If I were a man, you dare not speak so to me, Henderson; if I had a brother or a friend to defend me, I think you dare not! It is so easy to insult a girl, who can only hate you!" she cried with stinging vehemence.

“ You hate me ?—that proves that you are in my power, Hermine ! ”

“ Do you wish to drive me mad, or to torture me into a confession of thoughts and crimes which are utterly impossible to me, as they used to extort false confessions from poor frightened wretches by the rack ? Oh, Henderson ! what has made you so cruel—so relentless ? ”

We had struck into a side-path, leaving her companions in the broad walk below, and no one stood by to hear our strange words.

Placing my hands on her shoulders, so that she could not turn from me if she would, I looked resolutely on her white face.

“ *Because I know your secret, Hermine.* I wish to extort no false confessions from

you—I wish to use no cruel words that are unnecessary; but this knowledge gives me power over you—and as true as God is in Heaven, if you or John take one step toward the consummation of your unrighteous passion, that power shall be used fully, cruelly, revengefully. Your name shall be made a thing to call up indignant blushes on the face of every honest man and of every honest woman in Stuttgart; your memory shall become hateful among those who have known you—so hateful, Hermine, that, if at any time you cross their path, they would gather up their skirts to avoid the contamination of being touched by you! Think of that, Hermine—you who are so young and so lovely—you who are her daughter, who was once a babe on her bosom——”

Twice her lips moved without the power of utterance. When she spoke, her voice was thick and incoherent.

“You will repent speaking those words to me, Henderson — they are disgraceful, coming from a gentleman to a lady, from a man to a woman, from any one strong to any one weak. You used to be generous once—you are always gentle and forgiving to every one else—am I so much worse than other people, that all your gall and wormwood are to be vented on me? Am I so much worse than other women, that when I commit an error all God’s avenging angels are upon me? If a girl misses her right path in life, must she be hooted and pelted with mud, rather than set straight again? A charitable, pleasant world, truly!”

“She cannot be set straight unless she

is willing of herself, Hermine. Self-help is the only help of any value in such a case."

"She cannot help hating whom she hates, or loving whom she loves."

"Hermine, do you dare to aver to my face that you love your mother's husband?"

The faintest ripple of a desperate smile accompanied her words, which were clear and triumphant, as if intended for all the world to hear.

"I dare to aver to your face, Henderson—I dare to aver before God, that I love him!"

Heavens!—the dewy freshness of early summer twilight was around us, influenced us by a thousand whispering green leaves, twittering birds, and balmy breaths; fragments of childish laughter, of innocent

mirth of men and women, broke the stillness; pricks of golden light illumined the blue sky above us—surely this world of beautiful creations and gladsome humanities was a dream in which she who told me so awful a truth, with no shame on her girlish brow, and I who listened to it, bore no part!

“Am I so wicked that you will not speak to me, Hendy?” she said, at last.

Something in the old familiar name by which she always called me in the days of our friendship—something in her look, half of humility, half of wistful sadness—touched me.

“Heaven forbid, Hermine, that I should show such blindness to my own faults. If I have shown myself cruel and overbearing, it has only been with the hope of saving you.”

“ Say of saving my mother, Henderson. Be as truthful as I have been. You know that you would only save me to spare her ; if you did not despise me as you do, I could not help loving you, were it only for your faithful love and friendship for her.”

“ Hermine, Hermine ! — you are better than you allow yourself to appear ! — your heart is not utterly false yet. Are you not mindful of one whose love and duty to Marie can render her infinitely greater service than mine ? Are you not mindful of the ruin and desolation that must fall on her, on her husband, on yourself, on us all, by your refusal to sacrifice everything to this pure love and this high duty ? ”

A tear glistened in her eye, but she merely said,

“ You must let me go now, Henderson ; it is growing late.”

“ First tell me that you will not keep the assignation you have made with John ?”

Her spirit rose.

“ Am I watched so narrowly, so meanly ? Am I really so entirely in your power, Henderson ? ”

“ I have the power to disgrace you, and if you prove yourself deserving of disgrace, it shall not be used sparingly !”

“ But if I defy you !—if I defy disgrace and shame !”

“ The first you may do, if you like ; the last no woman can do.”

“ Adieu, Henderson. I give you my word that I will not speak to your brother to-night.”

She joined her companions, and I re-

mained where she had left me, till I saw the last flutter of her white dress among the foliage. Full of anxious thoughts, I returned home to Sophie and to peace.

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning Hermine entered our study, with an evident intention of coming to a clear understanding.

“Carl, will you go and feed my pigeons? We will call you back when Mr. Brown is ready for the Phædrus.”

The boy ran off delightedly. Without any hesitation Hermine began :

“Henderson, I cannot endure this any longer ; if you are determined to make my

life wretched I must seek a home elsewhere."

"You need not do that, Hermine. One word from you would cause Carline to dismiss me; you know that, and you wish me to know it, though you dare not say the words."

She covered her face and burst into tears.

"Oh! do not let us quarrel or taunt each other—we have said too many bitter things already! Let us be friends now, dear Hendy. I am very miserable—so miserable that I think I should almost welcome death."

Pity and indignation contended strongly within me. Was Hermine really thus wretched, or did she merely seek to deceive me into blindness? I felt my way very cautiously through the dark.

“Talk of life instead of death, Hermine. Tell me that you can take my hand and not blush to think the same hand will touch your mother’s ; look bravely towards the future, and hope for no pleasure, no happy days, that you cannot reach save by stepping in the mire. Promise me that, unless a day comes when you can stand by your mother’s side and welcome him back to his true home, you will never see John again.”

“I will make no promise,” she said quietly, “but I will confess, Hendy. If my confession does not stand for a promise, no promise of mine would ever give you faith. Listen, then : I have seen John this morning—I have spoken to him—we shook hands at parting. Do not look at me so fiercely—it was no lover’s meeting that I

have to tell you of. Oh ! Hendy, I love him! —does Sophie love you so?—the sound of his voice makes me tremble, the touch of his hand burns me like fire—I cannot look into his eyes, I can hardly take in the meaning of his words—and yet in spite of this, Hendy, I controlled myself, and met him as I might meet you after a parting. I did not turn pale, or tremble, or weep. I mastered my emotion, and spoke calmly. We merely said a word or two, a word or two that children might have heard, and then we parted. If we met to-morrow, we might say the same words again, and have no shame in recalling them.”

“ But, Hermine, it seems to me that there is a sense wanting in your mind, or you could not speak with so little self-reproach. Can you not understand how utterly

wicked and immodest it is of you to hold the merest stranger's intercourse with the man whom your love has driven from his wife's side."

Her pale, passionless face showed no resentment.

"Men are so hard to each other always, and so quick to set up sharp moralities of their own to worship, without any mercy for those who pass them by with heads uncovered. It is impossible for you to judge John or myself in this matter, since you could never have sympathy for minds less well-governed than your own. What would be a heavy temptation to your brother might be none to you—that does not follow that you are better than he."

"So that you clear John utterly?" I said this with stinging emphasis.

“I do not seek to clear him—I ask you to judge of him as a man less strong-minded and more impulsive than yourself.”

“Then an impulsive and weak-minded man is by no means to be blamed for loving his step-daughter better than his wife,” I added ironically; “your logic leads you to strange conclusions, I must confess, Hermine.”

“I will say no more,” she cried, passionately. “I came here humbly and earnestly, resolving to keep down my own feelings, to bear all the unsparing words you might say to me, to forget everything but my duty. You must see that, if I have injured my mother, I have brought no less unhappiness on him; he has lost wife, home, position, everything a man most values, through me—was it so wicked to desire that I might

be the means of restoring him to all these? With this purpose I sought you this morning—I came to ask you for that small service which one would hardly think any faults of his could withdraw from you. A little help, a kind word now and then, a brotherly shake of the hand, a letter of encouragement — surely these might be given ungrudgingly to him, if you were a shade less just and more generous. But you are happy and secure in your own hearth and love; you do not know what it is to be an outcast, and you have no pity. We will never mention this subject any more, Hendy, or we must part, and it would be difficult to part as friends if such were the case.”

“One moment more, Hermine—you do not forget the words I spoke last night.”

She had reached the door, but turned round quickly.

“Do you think my memory is so bad that I should forget what I can never forgive? Have no fears on that score, Henderson—I am sorry to say I remember but too well sometimes?”

“And your answer?”

It came slowly.

“If I prove myself to be in your power, use it cruelly, revengefully. When that time comes, I will defy you to do your worst!”

She held out her hand to me with a look of proud sadness, and for several weeks very few words passed between us.

CHAPTER VI.

AUTUMN came round again, colouring the landscape with the dewy reds and purples of thousands of orchards, ripening the grapes that Schiller loved so well on the banks of the silver Neckar, bringing the simple rural pomps of the Volk's Fest, and the dusty crowds, and the drumming of boy-soldiers, and the drinking of apple-wine, and the cooking of one million sour krauts and sausages.

To Sophie and myself, the season of completion came as a season of promise only; we were too thankful and joyful to speak of that promise save in low whispers at twilight time, but it led us on securely and sweetly to a joy that we knew not of, except in aspiration and prayer—to the joy of parentage, of baby-feet, of precious babblings in an innocent voice, of a little being to be all our own. Often when I returned from my day's work, I found Sophie looking with tearful, glad eyes on a tiny shoe or cap of her own making; and being caught in that humour, she would blush and hide her face on the shoulder of her stout professor.

Perhaps it was this Promise, this security of happiness in my home, this feeling of humility engendered by so many blessings,

that made my heart relent to John. I cannot tell, but I remember a conviction dawning upon me slowly, that I had been too puritanical in my allegiance to Marie—that I might really have served her more by watching my brother's footsteps, and trying to bring them near her. I regretted my hastiness in submitting to her decision. After all, to be generous to John was to disarm Hermine.

For I had grown terribly anxious about Hermine of late. A slow fever of restlessness seemed to consume her; her cheeks were thin and flushed, her eyes had an unnatural fire in them—her voice, once as clear and ringing as a bell, was hurried and hesitating—her whole appearance was that of a person suffering some intense mental conflict. I do not think Carline saw this

change. In society Hermine appeared the same as ever, dressed with her old brilliancy, satirized, coquetted, fascinated—and Carline dragged her into society from morning to night.

Carl had now many and many a long day at Weiler, for all of which he was indebted to Hermine's mediations, though she would accept no thanks. She never accompanied us, in spite of loving messages from Marie, that would have brought any other daughter to her mother's arms. Why did she hold aloof from her? Why did she start and tremble whenever she found herself alone with me?

Perhaps these holidays of Carl's made Marie almost happy. I used to think so, when I watched the two together—the mother all intent eagerness to listen and to

look, the bright impetuous boy never finding time and breath to say enough regarding his pursuits, pleasures, and companions. She never tired of asking him all kinds of simple questions about his games and lessons—hearing him play on the pianoforte, testing his talking powers in French and English. Then she discussed many vivid plans for their future—how they would form libraries, and buy pictures, and travel in Italy and England, and lighten up gloomy old Weiler with pleasant people, pleasant books, and pleasant memories.

The boy's susceptible temperament made him ever readier to build castles in the air than to content himself with any pleasures at hand. He idolized his mother, too, and gallantly promised to take the best care of her, and marry the wife she should

choose, provided she was a little like Ottilie and a good deal like Sophie.

One evening, whilst the horses were being harnessed for the return journey, Ottilie sought me in the gallery.

"Henderson," she said shyly, "I have come to scold you."

I looked up into her frank face.

"You are not acting a brother's part towards John," she continued with eagerness; "if everyone else condemn him, surely it is not your part to do the same. Do you think if he were my brother I should shake him off utterly even for *that*? And, besides, you would act a better and a kinder part to Marie, if you gave him your hand and acknowledged his right to take it. Is it impossible for him and Marie to come together again?"

“As husband and wife, yes, Ottilie.”

“I knew what your answer would be,” she said angrily; “but however well you may judge for your brother, Hendy, you cannot judge for *her*. When women love they can forgive beyond any man’s conception of forgiving. If you love and are deceived, you put away the deceiver with a scorn that smites to death or drives into recklessness. If a woman loves and is deceived, she dies or will love on in spite of all—to win her reward at last!”

“If I thought that Marie could be happy with John now, I would leave no stone unturned, Ottilie, to bring him to her side.”

“She must be happy, because she loves him so—she would find happiness in her faith—she would love him better for her forgiveness. Oh! dear Hendy, am I not a

woman?—have I not watched her eyes and lips when she has spoken of him?—trust me that I can see clearer than yourself.”

I thought of Hermine, and shook my head doubtfully.

“Hendy, you must not hesitate in matters of this kind—you must not reason even—only remember what we are; remember our weaknesses, our helplessness, our need of love as of daily bread. And if the love is not quite so good as that given by us in return, oh! dear brother, we can still be happier for it. Imperfect as those may be who love us, we can still forgive all for sake of their love; we are very generous—we are very liberal with our tenderness, Hendy; only love us, and we could die for you. Can you wonder that Marie has not recalled her words? Could *she* hold out

her hand to John first?—oh! no, she is too proud to seek him; but if he came of his own accord, if he fought his own battle desperately, he would win. If he came to-morrow, he would win. Besides, I do not think of Marie only. I think of John; so young, so good of heart, so generous as he is, was he deserving of such utter banishment—not only banishment from friends, but from brothers and sisters? Do you sleep peacefully at night, and never think that he might die with no one near him? Is it impossible that he may have known want, without a kind word to make it bearable? Hendy! it is terrible! You have allowed your affection for Marie to blind your sense of justice; but is it not better to err on the side of mercy? Are we to judge those of our own flesh and

blood harder than strangers judge them?"

Her cheeks glowed with indignant eagerness. Never before had Ottilie spoken with so much spirit.

"You will go away and forget what I have said by to-morrow morning. How hard you are, Hendy!"

"I will not forget it indeed, Ottilie. I assure you that my own heart has accused me lately, and——"

She clapped her hands joyfully.

"And you will find him and bring him here?" she whispered.

"I will seek him."

"You promise me to do so?"

"I promise."

"Then God bless you, dear Hendy," she cried, "and prosper your undertaking!"

CHAPTER VI.

THAT very evening I took the first step towards fulfilling my promise to Ottilie. I have before mentioned my uncle Blum's fondness for such little matters of business as only require inquisitiveness, caution, and speculation—mental speculation, I would have it to be understood, for the honour of the Colonel's prudence. If you asked him to assist in any matter necessitating the outlay of a gulden, his ignorance and incapability exceeded all imagination.

I reached the Weimar Strasse at the mo-

ment of my worthy relative's supreme good-nature ; for he had returned from the club, with an awful tale of murder to recount to his wife, over a steaming tin bowl of fragrant soup, out of which the leg-bone of a fine old cock protruded half-mast high. It was a pleasant sight to see the jolly, red-faced old soldier peep into the mysterious depths of the charmed pot, and bring out on the tip of his knife, first an onion, and then a gizzard, which he would hold to the light admiringly, loth, though longing, to launch into its eternity.

My uncle never led opinion, but followed it, as the hand of a weather-glass follows the quicksilver. Had I gone that night with the hottest expressions of anger against my poor brother, he would have joined in them. As I expressed my willingness to meet him and be reconciled, he commended the sentiments

entirely, and confessed that they had been his own all along.

When the soup was dispatched, and the Colonel had leisure for reflection, he puffed away vigorously at his cigar, looking at me earnestly all the while. By the time the cigar had wasted to an inch in length, my aunt's hundred-and-one questions about the Sophiechen were answered; then came the master's opinion.

“My dear son, *Eile mit Weile*, you know, we must take time and consider the likelihoods and unlikelihoods. Now, it seems to me that I had better write to the directors of the police in the principal mercantile towns (as you seem to fancy John would try to avail himself of his knowledge of languages in a mercantile house in North Germany), and request them to signify if such a passport as your brother's is in their pos-

session. The stamps perhaps may cost tenpence or so—certainly not more; and any letters of *mine* will procure immediate attention, of course, on my assigning proper reasons for such inquiry. What say you, my son? If we cannot find where he is, this way, we can find where he is *not*—which is something consolatory to one's feelings. Poor dear boy, I loved him as my own son; but he has a bad memory—he never paid back ten kreutzers that he borrowed of me when we went to Cannstatt two days after his arrival. But what are ten kreutzers in comparison with a father's love? My wife, let us lighten our dear Henderson's heart with a bottle of Neckar. Damn it, there goes Christine's baby again!"

I did leave the Weimar Strasse with a lighter heart, though I can hardly give my uncle's wine (which generally entailed an

acute colic upon me) the credit of it. To have made ever so slight an effort on John's behalf filled me with hope. As I walked back through the dusky park, I could hardly realize the idea that in a few days I might see the pleasant face and hear the cheery voice of my brother again. I think we are never so happy as when we have laid one stone on the grave of an old injustice or severe judgment.

I had to call at a jeweller's shop on my way home for a brooch of Sophie's. Whilst waiting for my packet, I noticed on the counter a handsome gold bracelet belonging to Hermine.

"I can take this home to the Fräulein Weiler, if it is ready," I said to the shopman; "I daresay she wants it during this gay season."

The man, an uncommonly obese and

slow-looking individual, rolled about in a nervous fit of surprise.

“Pardon, Herr Professor,” he replied, after contorting himself for several seconds, “this bracelet is not the property of the Fräulein Weiler.”

I took it up. On the back of the centre piece of mosaic work were cut in fine letters the initials “H. v. W.” Pshaw! I had seen the bracelet on Hermine’s arm dozens of times, and could have sworn to it without the mark of her name.

“Incontestably it *was* the Fräulein Weiler’s a few days ago,” I said; “would you mind informing me how you came by it?”

Herr Oppenheim knew me well, and answered my question good-temperedly.

“The fact is, Herr Professor, I bought it not two days ago,” with a prodigious curl

of his body, formed at every sentence, after the manner of an alderman-like worm, "and I bought it with a couple of rings from a gentleman."

"Come, do let me see those rings, there's a good man."

"With pleasure, Herr Professor."

He placed in my hand two rings that Hermine had worn only yesterday! What could this mean?

"You say a gentleman sold them to you, Herr Oppenheim. Was he tall or short, fat or thin, dark or pale, old or young?"

The good man heaved an enormous sigh, and for some moments could not speak.

"I haven't bought stolen goods, Herr Professor. God forbid I should come to that, and my poor father was made burgomaster, and was held a man of repute,"

and he wiped large drops of sweat off his forehead.

“If you have, I’ll answer that not a soul in Stuttgart would for one moment think that you were aware of it, Herr Oppenheim. Can you recollect anything of this gentleman?”

To ask the worthy jeweller questions was to inflict upon him the severest mental torture. Calling out “Gustchen,” in a stentorian voice, he surrendered the task to his daughter.

The Fräulein, who wore short sleeves and a low dress, after the manner of young ladies of the counter in Germany, was very proud of her English attainments, and, consequently, it was some time before I could arrive at any definition, as she persisted in using the most kaleidoscope grammar ever invented.

At last I learned that the stranger was tall, thin, and pale, with a dark moustache, and no beard—that he spoke good German, and that he seemed unusually sharp in striking a bargain.

But he was a perfect gentleman—the Fräulein knew *that* by the way in which he had asked her if she enjoyed going to the Fair—and he insisted upon taking the value of the things in Prussian thalers instead of Wirtemberg florins.

A train of thoughts as sharp and clear as an electric current flashed through my mind. Was it possible that Hermine had been carrying on a clandestine connection with John? Had he stooped so low as to subserve her love to his wants? Could he really have come to Stuttgart for the purpose of procuring money from her?

The idea was too despicable to be enter-

tained upon such scant suspicion. My brother's frank nature might be levelled to any sphere or companionship in time—it could never be brought to so contemptible a meanness already.

But what motive had induced Hermine to part with her jewellery? Carline heaped presents of money upon her ; besides which, she received an allowance from her mother, being the interest of property bequeathed by the late Baron. It seemed impossible that she could want anything, without having ample means at her disposal. As to the trinkets being stolen, it was hardly likely that three objects of such value would be taken at one time by one person, and to a shop in close proximity to the scene of theft.

The more I reflected, so much the more did every feature of this strange circumstance puzzle me. By no sophistry in the

world could I reason away the fact of the jewellery being parted with for money, and by the consent of Hermine.

This alone looked ugly enough—but to feel compelled to join John's agency in the matter was worse still. Only Hermine could clear herself, only Hermine could clear him. If she refused to do both, no one could doubt their guilt.

I resolved to hear her confession to-morrow, or once and for all to end my forbearance. Alas! it was a sad ending to so hopeful and happy a day.

By nine o'clock I presented myself at Carline's door, and begging the servant to say that I wished to see Hermine immediately, I proceeded to the study. It was empty, but Carl's Latin exercise lay on the table awaiting my corrections. I think I had gone through half a page, when the

copy-book was suddenly shut and cast on the floor. Looking up, I saw Carline standing by my side, with white lips and glaring eyes.

“Dare you enter my house again!” she said; “dare you look into my face, as if you were innocent!”

I was at first so utterly taken aback by her look and words, that I could say nothing. I could hardly realize the affront put upon me. I stood up and sat down again, not knowing what I did.

“I supposed that you had nothing to say, still I must have the truth, Mr. Brown; whether I get it now—whether I get it in a court of justice—I *will* have the truth. Are you inclined to spare me the latter trouble?”

“Excuse me,” I said, with recovered self-possession; “but I am utterly unable to comprehend one word you have spoken.

My conscience does not accuse me of having hurt your interests, or of shortcomings in my duty toward Carl. I shall be very glad to hear of what I am accused by you."

She looked at me with hard, cynical eyes.

"You say that your conscience does not accuse you of having hurt my interests—were you not hurting them when you knew of Hermine's correspondence with her mother's husband, and concealed it from me?"

I confess the unexpected thrust staggered me. Seeing her advantage she followed it up.

"You allowed her to barter away jewels of my giving, in order to procure money for this man: I presume you considered such a course unworthy of notice—quite natural and proper, in fact?"

Her irony stung me into defiance. I replied, coolly:—

“You must pardon me, Fräulein Weiler, for contradicting both these statements. I am aware that, some three months ago, my brother came to Cannstatt, and that he sought an interview with your niece, which she granted him. Of any correspondence or any intercourse whatever, since that time, I have been as ignorant as yourself. Last night, I admit to have, by chance, discovered some jewellery of hers in a shop for sale, and I came this morning with the intention of procuring an explanation from Hermine herself. You have now, Fräulein, the extent of my crimes.”

“You say that, three months ago, your brother came to Cannstatt seeking an interview with Hermine. Surely, if your principles were as nice as your scruples, you

would have come to me at once with the information. Was I not the fittest guardian of my niece?—did you deem it safe and right for a young girl to be linked in any way with a man of that stamp?—or did you, with all your show of affection for the despised wife, think it no harm in him to bring ruin on her daughter also? You English boast of your good morals, Mr. Brown—I confess the specimens I have seen lead me to think they are by no means immaculate!”

“Call Hermine,” I said; ‘I can trust to her honour to confirm my story.’”

At the mention of Hermine’s name, Carline seized hold of my chair for support, and turned ghastly white. When the tremor had passed, she looked at me long and searchingly.

“It is easy for you to appeal to Hermine’s

honour *now*," she answered ; " have you no other and better resource to fall back upon ? "

" If you will neither believe Hermine nor myself, I do not know from whence my resources should come ! " I said, angrily. " I can only repeat what I have said before—that, to any intercourse of hers with my brother, I have always had as great an abhorrence as yourself. If you say that you do not believe me, Fräulein, you will not speak sincerely."

" How can I believe you or anyone else for the future ? " she exclaimed, in a burst of passion. " Did not Hermine profess to love me ?—did she not eat of my bread and deck herself with my jewels ?—did she not kiss me, and call me her dear aunt, her best friend ?—how has she shewn her sincerity ? By deceiving me under all this semblance

of affection, by robbing me of money—ay, start, Mr. Brown, if you like, *by robbing me of money for your brother and her mother's husband!* It makes me sick of anger to think that one of Marie's children should turn against me so! If I had not felt convinced of my sister-in-law's foolish passion for that man, I should be disposed to think that all four of you were in conspiracy against me, out of revenge. But why waste words? Here is your salary, Mr. Brown, with an overplus, to shew that I appreciate your services to Carl, though I have no thanks to give. It cannot be necessary for you to take leave of him. Good morning."

I placed myself before the door to prevent her going.

"I do not take your money in this way, Fräulein. I do not take my dismissal till I

have had an explanation from Hermine in your hearing. My good name is all that I possess, whereby to maintain a respectable position. You shall not rob me of it so easily. Where is Hermine?"

"Hermine?—Hermine?" said Carline, wildly, whilst she pressed her hands over her temples—"oh! call her loudly, loudly, Mr. Brown!"

She reeled, and, catching at my hand, fell to the ground in a state of insensibility. My vehement ring brought in half-a-dozen servants, who stood by in gasping helplessness.

"Call the Fräulein Hermine immediately!" I said to Hermine's maid, Gustele. "Your mistress has received a shock, and is very ill."

The whole stupid, clownish crew looked at each other in silence.

“Do you hear?” I repeated, angrily.
“Call the Fräulein immediately.”

Gustele stepped forward and burst into tears.

“As true as Christ, Herr Professor, the Fräulein Hermine is gone—no one knows whither !”

CHAPTER VII.

LEAVING Carline to the cares of the women, I beckoned the butler into another room, and endeavoured to gain from him some particulars of this terrible news. I knew that he was cavalierly attached to his young mistress, who, in spite of her capriciousness, won all servants' hearts by liberal gifts. I knew, too, that he had a large family at home, for whom he could hardly provide, even with good wages and plentiful vails—was it not just possible that he had been bribed into connivance with Hermine's secret.

“This is a sad business, Fritz!—when was the flight of the Fräulein discovered?”

“This morning at eight o’clock. Gustele went to her young lady’s room as usual to assist her in the toilet, but the toilet had been made without her, Herr Professor.”

Was the man really so simple as he appeared to be? I doubted it.

“It strikes me, Fritz, that the Fräulein’s flight was not equally surprising to every one in the house.”

“So my mistress believes,” he replied, with tears in his eyes; “and we have all warning to leave to-morrow. ’Tis a bad job for us, Herr Professor. The Gnädige Fräulein has her bad humours, but she keeps plenty of company, and we always get thought of by the gentlemen.”

“Your mistress has not dismissed you without a hearing, Fritz. Tell me now

in what way did you assist the Fräulein?"

He scratched his head and looked very mournful.

"Assist her, Herr Professor! I knew no more that she intended to run away than my baby who was born last week, or I shouldn't have done what I did. One doesn't find a good place every day, and the babies grow like cabbages."

"What did you do, Fritz? It can do you no harm by telling me, and I will think of the babies."

His stupid features brightened sensibly.

"I only carried her bracelets and rings to the gentleman who waited for them in the Park—a pleasant-spoken gentleman—who gave me half-a-florin."

"When was that?"

"The day before yesterday, Herr Professor, at three o'clock, or near upon, God

forbid that I should ever be befooled again in the same way. I thought the Fräulein had a right to give away her own, especially to a sweetheart."

"Did the person in the Park strike you as being a foreigner—an Englishman?"

"I can't say, Herr Professor."

"Have you ever carried letters anywhere on the sly for the Fräulein?"

He suddenly shut the door, then coming up to me he whispered close in my ear—

"Three; but my mistress only knows of one. Do, Herr Professor, be kind enough to keep the secret."

"Three letters! Where were they carried, and when?"

"Oh, dear! Herr Professor, you puzzle me. I have forgotten the days entirely; but they were carried, and by me."

Fritz was not so slow but that the con-

viction had glimmered upon him of some advantage accruing to himself through his secret services.

“Were they carried within the last few weeks?”

“I believe I may say yes to that, Herr Professor. But I can swear to having taken them with my own hands.”

“To whom? A great deal depends upon your answering this question, Fritz.”

For a long time Fritz scratched his head in deep thought. I could see clearly enough that he knew what I wanted to find out, but that he felt half-doubtful whether a better market for his secret might not turn up.

“To whom?—oh, dear! good Herr Professor, how you frighten me! What shall I do? I only wanted to act my duty towards the Fräulein Hermine, and see into what a scrape am I brought!”

I began to get impatient.

“Don’t be a fool, Fritz. Here are half-a-dozen florins, which I put into your hand when you put that address into mine.”

Eyeing the florins wistfully, he drew from his pocket a very solid piece of paper, on which was written, in his own vile scrawl, the following address :—

Ludwig-Johann Ries,

Dritter Stock,

Hoch Strasse, No. 30,

Frankfurt, A.M.

“You copied the Fräulein’s envelope?”

“Yes, Herr Professor—thinking, perhaps—perhaps, it might be useful.”

“You are certain that all three letters were directed the same?”

“As certain as I am of the brains in my head, Herr Professor.”

“You had better not be too certain of those; but, excepting that I advise you to give up posting secret letters for the future, I have nothing more to say, Fritz.”

Left to my own thoughts, I speedily framed a plan of action—the only plan which seemed open to me—namely, to follow up Fritz’s clue. Whether the address was John’s or not, upon it hung evidently a chain of circumstances, linking the two lovers together; upon it I must found all hopes of discovering them. I was preparing to leave the house, when Gustele called me back.

“My mistress is better, and insists upon seeing you before you go, Herr Professor. She is in her own room.”

There I found her, walking to and fro, in a strange mood of mingled calmness and agitation.

“I have several things to say to you,” she said, coldly ; “will you sit down?”

“I presume you have good reasons for detaining me, or I should beg to be excused,” I replied. “My time is important just now.”

“Yes, I *have* good reasons. In the first place, Mr. Brown, are you aware into what amount of treachery Hermine’s madness has led her?”

“I must again repeat, Fräulein Weiler, that, beyond the fact of seeing her jewellery in Oppenheim’s shop yesterday, I knew nothing till I came here this morning.”

“I do not see why I should doubt your word, seeing that you have hitherto proved sincere. Can you believe that Hermine, with her young face and small white hands, should lower herself so far as to take money from my desk—to *rob me*, in fact, for this

lover? Is there any wonder in a man's dissoluteness when he meets with women so base, so shameless? Bah!—it makes my flesh crawl to think of her doing this— young, and attractive, and pretty, as she is, and as likely as any girl to marry the first nobleman in the land! Well, to speak of this horrible money affair. Hermine has always kept my keys for me, and last night she made use of them to carry out her purpose. I would have given her three hundred florins freely for any reasonable want; but to have them taken from me, and for him, is hard to bear. Read her explanation. Could anything be more cool or unsatisfactory?"

She handed me the note, which was written almost illegibly, and blotted in many places :—

“Hermine Weiler will never rest night or day till she has repaid every kreutzer of the three hundred florins, which nothing but the most fatal necessity would ever have compelled her to take. She hopes and trusts to be forgiven both for this and any other thing she may do to cause grief or shame to those who love her.”

“And now, Mr. Brown, can you be surprised that I ask you to take Carl home?” said Carline, watching my face earnestly.

“Carl?”

“Carl. Let him go, before he also has turned upon me. I have suffered enough from so ungrateful a family. I never wish to see or hear anything of Marie Weiler’s family again. She accused me of robbing her of her children’s love — she cannot accuse me of robbing her of her husband’s; perhaps she will feel now that I am not the

only enemy, or the worst, that she possesses. But let that rest. We have been fools all along to quarrel, and it is time for us to leave off reproaches now. Take Carl home; do not let him come to me first, for I cannot bear leave-taking."

She sat down opposite to me, looking weary and haggard.

"Yet the boy loves me, Mr. Brown; I should like to see him by-and-bye, or to have little letters from him. And—and I think I have been unjust to you—will you shake hands before we part, for Carl's sake?"

We shook hands, and still she appeared unwilling for me to go.

"Can I be of any service to you?" I asked.

"I should never like Marie to think that I grudge, or ever shall grudge, anything I

have done for Hermine and Carl. You will therefore do me a favour if you conceal the fact of Hermine's robbery—that is all I wish to say," she replied, and turned away her head nervously, as if ashamed of the most generous sentiment that perhaps had fallen from her lips for many years.

CHAPTER VIII.

“WHO will have courage to tell Marie?” was Sophie’s first thought.

I was to start by the Main Neckar Railway, for Frankfurt, in twenty minutes—far too short a time for consultation and parting words both.

“Carl and I had better go to Weiler at once,” Sophie continued; “and a letter from you, breaking the news as carefully as possible, might be sent off this evening. In her joy at having Carl back again, she will better support the trial.”

“But, my darling, your face, or Carl’s either, would say ‘*bad news*’ as plainly as if the words were spoken by the crier.”

“Ah!” she said with a little sigh, “I had forgotten how difficult it is to hide one’s feelings.”

“Supposing, Sophiechen, that I send my letter by you?”

“Write at once, dear,” she replied; “anyhow let it be so that I have not to tell her myself, or to pretend to look cheerful when I know all.”

I wrote a short but cautious letter, not throwing too much weight on Hermine’s flight, not implying an absolute conviction that it was connected with John, not hinting a word of her clandestine correspondence. She must learn the worst slowly. We stood on the platform, my little wife and I, only at the last moment recalled to our own reluctance at parting.

“You will write every day till you return, Hendy,” whispered Sophiele earnestly; “and you will not quarrel or fight duels, or be robbed or murdered. Promise me.”

“And you will take care of yourself also, if you please, and not fret or grow low-spirited or——”

“Nach Bruchsal—Heidelberg—Frankfurt!” cried the guard stentoriously, as he rang the last bell, and with one long, silent kiss we parted.

When the pretty town, with its old grey Frauenkirche, and white palace and sheltering green hills, was lost in the distance, and we approached Ludwigsburg, which was so near to Marie, my grief at leaving Sophie merged itself into the greater, less selfish grief that had fallen on us all.

Hermine gone!—and gone to whom?

Could I realize the full extent of the misery that these words implied? Could even the first blow hurt Marie so much as the after-coming of bitterness and loneliness must do? And my brother—oh! in spite of all my self-imposed hardness and unforgiveness, I had never thought till now that we were parted for life. Though he had wronged Marie, though the mark of his passionate hand remained on my brow, still in my heart I had called him brother. The old genial smile of his eyes—the old warm grasp of the hand—the old boyish “Hendy”—would have melted me instantly. Alas! alas! that a time should come for me to hate myself for bearing my brother’s name.

Hermine too—did she realize the infinitude of such degradation? Was there no woman’s softness, no maiden’s shame in

that girl, with her loveliness and rare powers of mind? Were the clear blue eyes never more to look straight into an honest woman's face? Was the silken chestnut hair dragged down so low in the world's dirt? Oh! women, oh! my sisters, could you only know how often the first step in coquetry is the last in clean paths—could you only know how often we despise ourselves for yielding to the soft wicked influences of such coquetry, how we despise even the beauty whilst it enslaves us—you would never seek to win that which is only worth having when it comes unsought—you would never rejoice over a love that you have paid for by so many looks, and smiles, and words, each and all forfeitures of self-respect—a love that any other woman cleverer or less scrupulous than yourself could have bought!

Had Hermine promised herself happiness, ease, pleasure in the future? Was she degraded to the capability of an impure enjoyment, to the capability of a stained life? Or had she madly rushed into the arms of her passionate lover, content to take one moment's bliss with him and die? The latter mood seemed to me more tolerable to think of than the former. We can forgive a fault of impulse—a premeditated sin, never; and with all the suspicious circumstances bearing that way, I could not still bring myself to believe in Hermine's flight having been long planned. So, thinking, thinking, thinking, always of the one great ruin which hung over us, I sped on towards Frankfurt.

I had no eyes for the loveliness of the journey—no eyes for the rich Bavarian landscape, with its green heights, its hazy

lengths of undulating flax, its patches of purple beetroot, its glows of golden Indian corn, its avenues of walnut-trees, under which peasant boys in their cocked-hats, and blue-skirted women, rested over their noonday meal, and looked up sleepily as we whizzed past them. We stopped two hours at Heidelberg, which is ample time for tourists to "do" the grand historic old place in the go-a-head style, with Mr. Murray's assistance; but I was too wrapt up in my own cares to play the enthusiastic then. I am conscious of having walked to and fro under the trees behind the dreary, little station, wholly intent upon a poor old peasant woman who was seeing off a boy-soldier (her son) to some distant province; and never once recollecting that I was within a walk of that famous ruin which is the rarest epic poem left us by the Middle

Ages. Many years after, when I visited Heidelberg, with Sophie's bright face beside me, I studied the divine poem chapter by chapter, and verse by verse, with real enthusiasm, and felt glad then that the reading had come in a happier time. Truly Heidelberg Castle should be one of the brightest pictures of our lives, whether we look at it and love it as artists, painters, poets, or historians.

But at any time the humanities of a place strike me more forcibly than any picturesque or Romanesque colourings of it; and to this day, I remember Heidelberg always in connection with the old peasant woman, and her burst of sorrow as the train drew up—"Mein Herz, mein Herz, vergiss dein Mutter nicht!" (My child, my child, never forget thy mother!)

Glimpses of the Bergstrasse and the

Odenwald, glimpses of white villages shining amid vine-wreathed hills, of hoary-headed castles, and sunny slopes at their feet, of distant prospects of pine woods and bosky hollows, of gleams of placid water here and there, of jewelly orchards and vineyards near at hand, where fruit-gatherers made merry in the sun. At last we glided into the charmed region of Twilight, awakening now and then from slumberous silence, at the sound of the guard's horn, to strange fancies of the olden time, whereby every dark outline became an enchanted castle, every grotesque shadow a legendary dragon, every gleam of white the robe of some fair Liba fleeing from fire and sword.

“This is Sachsenhausen, monsieur, that peculiar offshoot of Frankfurt, where the people speak in such droll brogue, and are so charmingly simple, that M. Hassall, our

great comic actor, has immortalised both in his inimitable ‘Hampelman!’ You must hear him before you leave.”

I had dozed off during the latter part of my journey, and woke to find my companion still talking to me, as if I had been the liveliest of fellow-travellers. Before I could apologise, the Sachsenhausen suburb, and the shining river, and the main bridge were behind us, and the lamps of the station had flashed every recollection from me but one.

“In Frankfurt at last!”

I looked at my watch, and found that, were I on the right track, Hermine could have only gained on me by four hours.

CHAPTER IX.

IN a quarter of an hour I found myself facing a glass door on the third landing of No. 30, Hoch Strasse, in which was stuck a card bearing the names—

Moritz Schmidt, Photographer and Artist.

Lina Schmidt, Teacher of the French Language.

My vehement ring brought a lively step to the door and a good-tempered rebuke.

“Pardon me, mein Herr,” said a dingily-dressed little woman, with a bright Jewish face, “I thought it had been my pupils.”

“I particularly want to see Herr Ries. Does he live here?” I replied.

“Yes, he is our lodger; but he has not been at home for several days. Is your business *very* urgent, mein Herr?” and she looked up inquisitively.

“It is urgent. May I be allowed to ask where I am most likely to find him?”

“Will you come inside and speak to my husband?” she answered, as if the question were too weighty for feminine decision, though she looked by no means deficient in that quality.

I followed her into an apartment crowded with the appurtenances of bed-room, sitting-room, studio, and nursery, where a melancholy but handsome-looking man was sitting at a table, drawing with one hand, and holding a baby on his lap by the other—a poor wee baby, tied between two pillows,

after the unwholesome German custom.

“This gentleman wants to see Herr Ries on urgent business,” said the brisk little lady, taking the child in her arms. “What is he to do, Moritz?”

The artist looked at me with a strange expression of interest and inquiry.

“Many gentlemen come to Herr Ries on important business,” he replied quietly; and then he seemed to await further information.

“I have no hesitation in naming my errand if necessary. I know nothing of Herr Ries. I have never seen him in my life; but he possesses some information that I must obtain from him to-night, either by fair means or foul.”

A telegraphic dialogue took place between the husband and wife. Their faces were not such as to awake suspicion, and I proceeded.

“Indeed, it is not impossible that Herr Ries may prove to be my own brother in disguise, unless *you* have the means of disproving it. Do you object to tell me how long you have known him?”

The wife replied with a sharp little laugh.

“You seem to fancy, mein Herr, that we have cause to be very nice on the subject of our lodger. We are in his secrets no more than we could help being in the secrets of any gentleman living under our own roof. I hope he may not turn out to be your brother, that’s all, for his ways of living are—are very peculiar.”

The artist seemed hurt at the little lady’s lightness.

“You see, mein Herr, that so long as our lodger pays his rent and acquits himself in a proper manner at home, we have no further concern with him. Herr Ries does

no worse things than many other gentlemen; but let us be certain of his identity, and then we can speak more satisfactorily."

He rose and placed the photographic likeness of a face as handsome, perhaps, as John's, but whose expression repelled me instinctively. It was a face in which refinement of dissipation had done its worst on refined features, leaving no look of youth, or of honesty, or of cheerfulness behind. It made my flesh creep to think that John or Hermine had indebted themselves to such a man.

"Say what you please, Herr Schmidt," I said, laying the portrait aside; "whether Herr Ries is my brother's friend or enemy, I am afraid he could hardly have a worse."

"He hardly could," replied the artist gravely.

"Why be so secret and delicate?" cried

the little mistress vivaciously. "Moritz, don't you know that the gentleman is very anxious to find out Ries and all his business. Where is he?—what does he practise by way of profession?—you can answer these questions easily."

The artist looked at me with an expression of hurt pride that was painful to witness.

"I do not wish to be disobliging, mein Herr—but—but—I owe him money."

"Money—money!" screamed the wife angrily, "why did you not tell me?"

"I borrowed a few thalers from him for my rent, which I am unable to pay just yet," he continued, with a deprecating look at his wife; "and if you come to Herr Ries as an enemy—as a spy—as a creditor—as anything unpleasant—I must decline assisting you. He could throw me into prison if he liked, which would be bad

for these,"—pointing to his wife and baby. "I hope I do not appear cowardly or mean, mein Herr, but a poor man is sore pressed at times, and is glad to make use of such friends as he has."

Poor fellow! I could see that the confession cost him dear. I would have offered him money, but his face was too noble to give me courage. I wished that the little wife and I could have settled the business without him.

"I merely require some information from Herr Ries about my brother, which can hardly, I think, do more than compromise him in my own opinion."

"You will be fortunate if you find it so," resumed the artist; "but Herr Ries's profession is no secret, and with that piece of intelligence you will have little difficulty in guessing his whereabouts."

He looked at me earnestly, crossed over to my chair, and, bending down, said in a low voice :—

“He is a gambler !”

The horror suggested by these words was lost to me in my extreme satisfaction at having gained a clue. I started up at once.

“I am extremely grateful. Rely upon it that Herr Ries shall never know of my interview with you, and that you shall receive some proof of my gratitude before I leave Frankfort. Good evening.”

On the stairs, however, I was stopped by the lively little Jewess.

“My husband is more nice than wise, and will never lay by a penny for his children,” she whispered. “Ask me as many questions as you like about Herr Ries. I have no tell-tale face and no tell-tale tongue

—if one has a gambler in one's house, that does not follow that he must be treated like a saint. This Ries is a bad fellow—he is attached to the Kursaal at Homburg, they say, and hangs about the gaming-tables for the purpose of lending money to those who have lost, by way of encouraging them to play again. When the luck turns he pounces upon them, with a fearful interest tacked to the debt. He has ruined numbers of men and women, who would otherwise have given up play after their first great loss. If you want to get anything out of him you must make him see an interest in his disclosures or a fear in his silence—do you understand ? ”

“ He is only moved by money or by self-preservation.”

“ Just so. And he is difficult to manage—oh ! if you are too honest he will turn

you round his little finger in five minutes. Well, go to Homburg, and good luck to you !”

I shook hands by way of slipping a little testimony of my gratitude into her palm, at which she looked up, smiling an unmistakeably Jewish smile.

“ You feel certain that Herr Ries has returned from his journey to Stuttgart ? ” I asked at parting.

“ Certain—and that he did not go for nothing.”

“ Are you inclined to tell me any more ? ”

She laughed again, in the sharp little way.

“ Of course ladies must know a good deal about their lodgers, and I don’t mean to deny having been curious in Herr Ries’s Stuttgart journey—especially when I found that there

was a lady in the case, and a pretty young lady, too."

She whispered in my ear for a few moments; and then, feeling as if my life had turned to such bitterness that hardly home and Sophie's love could ever sweeten it again, I set my face towards Homburg.

CHAPTER X.

I THINK it is Thomas De Quincey who, in one of those stupendous phrases which cut into clear day the combinations and evolutions of a hundred dusky analogies, likens the poet Shelley to a maniac seraph. The daringness of the comparison, the blending together of elements so antagonistic, have never been equalled. Such sweetness, such delicacy of perception, such noble imaginativeness, such raving recklessness, such blind frenzy, such headlong unreasonableness — could any other words, or union of words,

bring these contrasted qualities so clearly before us ?

When I recall the Kursaal of Homburg, with its outward enticements of elegance, of luxury, of voluptuousness, and its underlying strata of perhaps the most fatal, debasing, and unnatural passions to which men and women are subject—I wish for some diamond pen, like that of the great writer, to shape my thoughts into such glittering incarnations.

Truly the place is a demoniacal Paradise. You pass through superb halls and corridors flooded with the jewelly light of countless candelabras, and with the sound of Mozart's or Rossini's most thrilling melodies ; the light, the music, the fragrance of flowers, the light laughter and smiles of fair women, engulph your senses with a drowsy overwhelming of sensuous enjoyment ; you are

drawn on by this ecstasy of sight and sound, you follow the trail of glistening silks over mosaic pavements, you pass marble balustrades leading down to brilliant gardens—finally, you enter a majestic room, where your foot sinks in the thick velvety carpet, which glows with flowers; where the walls are painted by delicatest brushes with the loves of Eros and Psyche, with the Cytherean Aphrodite and her golden-haired band of dancers; with numberless Calypsos, whose lovely limbs are warm with colour and animation. Then, the constant clinking of money, the heaps of it in silver, and gold, and paper, which lie around you, only waiting to be won—and won so easily!—the incitement to wealth by the lavishness of it, the temptation to excitement by the inflaming of so many passions, the growing, glutting crave for success by the spectacle of the

lucky winner—where on the whole earth's surface is so subtle a snare spread in the sight of any bird?

At the time of which I write, the line of railway from Frankfort to Homburg had not been opened; and, as I was not disposed to wait for the Eilwagen, I had been under the necessity of hiring a fiacre, by which means I reached my destination just as the evening concert commenced in the music-hall. Hastily passing through the reading-room and corridor, I found myself in the glaring scene just described. I now slackened my steps, studying the face of every player as I walked round the tables. They were not crowded, and I noticed that the most desperate-looking faces were intent upon roulette, while among the *rouge et noir* gamblers not a few seemed to be visitors like myself, who had put down a handful of

florins for the fun of the thing. But the vice and rottenness of the whole system can be apparent even to the most superficial observer. A single face at the roulette-table preaches a thousand sermons on one text. Oh ! the haggard lines around the mouth, the sunken eyes, the flushed or death-like complexion, the quivering lips, the trembling, grasping, despairing hands ! The hands alone are a study in themselves !

The excitement of the roulette players was terrible. Heaps of bank-notes lay on the table, and five-franc pieces were raked up by the score.

First, sat two old men, apparently Englishmen and brothers, whose threadbare coats and white hair would have won for them respectful pity in any other place. They constantly made eager reckonings on their cards, and whispered together at

every turn of the game, with pitiful looks on the paltry heap of florins before them. Next sat a woman, young still, but apparently a beauty once, whose sharpened features and slovenly dress betokened how far she had fallen a victim to the madness of the place. As I stood near I saw that she drew the last florin from her shabby purse, and laid it on the table with a low gasp.

Near her sat another woman, who drew my attention principally because she would have been unnoticeable in any other circumstances, being quiet, gentlewomanly, and respectable to a degree. She was apparently about fifty, had a pleasing, healthful face and soft grey hair—yet, God help her! she played as feverishly as the others.

As I passed the high chair of the supervisor of the game, I caught sight of the

man I was seeking. He stood between two youths, who looked like raw Scotch collegians, and was evidently drawing them on to play, by chuckling over his winnings and doubling his stakes at every turn. I watched him for ten minutes, at the end of which time the boys had each drawn out a silk purse (perhaps knitted at home by mother or sister), and laid down a poor little heap of silver on the table.

My whisper in his ear attracted attention immediately. He seemed in doubt whether to show civility or not; but, after an oath or two, promised to attend upon me as soon as the game was up. I looked on with interest, and saw that the Scotch boys were invariably lucky, and doubled their stakes with flushing cheeks and bright eyes.

“Well?” said Ries, eyeing me superciliously when he had turned from the table.

"Be quick, please, Herr Ries—I cannot stop for anything but the merest information regarding my brother."

"And if I don't give it you?"

"I can compel you."

"How so?"

He drew aside so as to be hidden from observation.

"I can compel you, Herr Ries, because some knowledge that I have gained places you in my power."

"Whew!"

He fronted me scornfully.

"And, pray, what knowledge, may I ask?"

"I can have no hesitation in telling you. First and foremost, you have been instrumental in a shameful scheme, which, once exposed, would ruin your character—the scheme led you to Stuttgart two days ago."

“Damn you!—what right have you to spy upon my actions?”

“Have you forgotten my relationship to the Fräulein Weiler and the Herr Brown? I reminded you of it just now.”

“If a young lady falls in love with a married gentleman, and throws everything else to the winds, I suppose that you will not hold other people accountable for her folly?”

I seized his arm with a ferocious grip.

“This is useless trifling. From the moment that I set foot in Frankfurt the Fräulein Weiler and my brother are placed beyond your reach; if you want to know the why and the wherefore, you have them—because I know you, because I can bring the police upon you in a moment, and not only force your confession of that out of a hundred other plots by which you have

enriched yourself. If you doubt me I can enlighten you further."

"Do so," he said, doggedly.

I proceeded to feel my way very cautiously through the intricate mass of truth and suggestion that had been supplied me by the little Jewess's information, and by my own knowledge of the story. Ries was a difficult man to manage, I could see that. My only chance lay in frightening him with a show of more evidence than I really possessed, and in this artificial work one flaw would have spoiled all.

"Let us come into the garden," he whispered; "we can talk safer there."

I followed him down the marble steps, and along a white gravel path that led along the back of the Kursaal. Here all was dark and quiet, and as we walked our

feet stumbled on the loose bricks and splinters which lay scattered about.

“They are building a summer theatre here,” my companion continued. “This boarding will be removed in a few days to make room for the stage. Let us come inside, for the garden is devilishly damp, and you never know who may be behind you.”

We descended some break-neck workman’s ladder, which led into the body of the theatre, a small space covered with shavings and rubbish, and open to the sky. Here Ries, drawing out his fusee box, proceeded to light his pipe, eyeing me furtively all the while.

That look put me on my guard, and not too soon, for immediately the light had gone out he sprang upon me. The villain’s purpose was clear enough. With his knee upon my chest, his hands clutching my

throat, and with a loaded pistol rattling in his pocket, should I not have been utterly at his mercy? It is no uncommon thing for a ruined gambler to blow his brains out, and few people are very solicitous as to inquiries in such cases. Had he killed me then, he might have finished his ruinous work in safety. Marie could never know—Sophie could never know the secret on which hung so much of hope and of dismay—Hermine and John were lost utterly.

We had a desperate struggle in the dark. Ries's height and slenderness of build gave him an advantage over me, hardly made up for by my bull-dog tenaciousness and training. His art consisted solely of kicks and gripes—mine, of defending myself from them, and knowing the unfailing effect of a straight, close-fisted blow on the bread-basket, I watched my opportunity and

doubled him up before he could save himself.

The clattering of the boards and the clouds of sawdust that filled my eyes told me that the stroke had told. In another moment he was up and shaking himself with unpleasant mutterings.

“Come, Herr Ries,” I said, impatiently, “let us have done with this foolery and part company. So long as you withhold yourself from my relations, in future I have no wish and no intention of having anything more to do with you. It is a bad sign when you resort to such measures by way of procuring silence.”

“I don’t want you to hold your tongue about me if you think you can do it profitably,” he replied. “I only desire, as most men desire, to make the best bargain for myself.”

“So ! you wish to sell the secret of your

own transactions in this matter? Have you no cleaner work of your hands to dispose of, Herr Ries?"

"But supposing that another party is ready to buy it, clean or foul, what say you to this view of the case, mein Herr?"

"I say what I have said before. All the knowledge I want I can procure of you whether you will or no."

I knew that money would have brought him to terms on the instant; but, besides having a deep-rooted English abhorrence of buying a rascal, I had a German abhorrence of buying anything that it was my right to obtain for nothing. That Hermine and John should stoop so low as to make use of this man, and then buy over his secresy, I could never for a moment believe.

"But," continued Ries, in a cool, demonstrating voice, "you don't consider how

I can repay such pleasant behaviour. When a lady and gentleman put their reputation into other people's hands, they don't draw it out so easily. If you won't pay me for speaking, you surely will pay me for holding my tongue?"

"We cry quits," I said; "I leave you alone, you do the same to me. There is no obligation on either side, and the advantage is certainly yours. If you keep me here all night, Herr Ries, you get no nearer a single kreutzer of mine."

"Then damn you, for the meanest scoundrel on the face of the earth!" he cried; and, flinging a card at my head, turned on his heel.

We had quitted the theatre whilst speaking, but the garden path was hardly less dark. It took me several minutes, with the help of a lighted fusee, to find the card, and to assure myself that I was not duped.

CHAPTER XI.

It was ten o'clock by the time I reached my destination, a rambling old house in Frankfort, facing the river. The door is still open, and I grope my way up the five dark staircases, with beating heart.

A staid, matronly country woman answers my inquiry if the Herr Brown is at home with a laconic nod, and standing aside with her light held over her head she allows me to enter. I pass a tiny kitchen, and Speisekammer, or larder, then from

one small room into a larger, where I find those whom I have come to seek.

Though the chamber is but partially lighted by a wretched candle, I have to shield my eyes at first in order to see anything, for the least change of light or agitation always affects my vision.

Hermine sits within two yards of me, and as I enter she looks up, but her face tells no tale. She is very pale, paler perhaps for the dark brown dress, which I had never seen her wear before, and which was strangely at variance with her glowing chestnut hair and piquante loveliness of feature. I do not think of her beauty now, I only think that the small white hands clasped on her knees can never, never touch my wife's or my sister's again, and the thought brings deep sadness with it, though I feel no pity.

Nothing can be bleaker than the large scantily furnished apartment that I see. There is a round table in the centre, on which are two medicine bottles, a heap of papers, some music books, and a woman's bonnet; a small clothes press, two or three chairs, and a walnut-wood pianoforte complete the inventory. On second scrutiny, I find that I have missed something which stands in the upper part of the room, where the light is faintest. It is a bed, and when I approach it I see a mass of brown hair tossed on the pillow, and my brother's wan face turned upwards, with eyes that did not recognize me.

I beckon the woman to the bedside.

"When was he taken ill?"

"He was brought here last night, but the fever must have been on him some days."

"Have you called in a doctor?"

She points to Hermine.

“The Fräulein brought money to pay for everything—we should have done our best without it—but we are poor people, and dared not run into more expense than we could help. I got him some fever mixture from the apothecary, and the doctor that the Fräulein sent for has not found fault with it.”

“What does he call the disease?”

“Low fever, mein Herr—my brother died of it. Christ bless the poor child!” and she touched the invalid’s brow with the softness that helpless manhood always calls forth in kindly woman.

I had been standing with my back towards Hermine, but now I drew nearer to her, and said in distinct tones, still looking at the nurse,

“You have prepared a room for the Fräulein?”

“The Fräulein says that she shall not go to bed to-night, but intends to remain up with me,” she answered; “I did not oppose her, for it’s wearisome work sitting up by one’s self.”

“The Fräulein must go to her own room—tell her that I say so.”

I did not heed Hermine’s piteous look of appeal, but walked gently to the door, and held it open. She understood the action. No words of abhorrent bitterness, no scorn, no reproach, could have humiliated her so much. Still the love was stronger than pride. Notwithstanding the sanctity of the sick-room, notwithstanding the presence of the nurse, she fell on her knees before me, with such a face of entreaty as I shall not easily forget.

“Henderson, have pity, have pity!” she whispered.

I thought of another whose rightful place should have been by John's bedside, and I would not relent. Leaving the door open, I walked away from her. When I looked up I was alone with John.

He had moved a little, and was talking painfully to himself, under the influence of a sedative which had stupefied him without giving sleep. His lips were terribly parched; his hands felt hot and dry, and his head was burning; whilst his pulse beat so low that it could hardly be perceived. A cooling drink of tamarind water stood by the bedside, and, raising his head, I poured a few drops down his throat. His eyes, without recognising me, seemed to miss *Hermine*. They wandered wistfully to the door, then to her empty chair, then to her bonnet on the table.

“So good—so noble of her!” he mur-

mured, and then his head fell back wearily, and he closed his eyes.

Soon the nurse bustled in, banging the door with a sound that made John start uneasily, and bearing in her hands a large basin of coffee and a steaming cutlet, apparently quite oblivious as to the possibility of an invalid's quick perception of smell. She seemed hurt at my refusal to eat—"Poor fellow, he was as insensible and innocent as a new-born babe—he wouldn't be the wiser, that was certain, if I chose to sup off garlic soup," she said, pointing to John; "and the Fräulein had refused supper too; dear, dear, it was of no use to fret our poor dear stomachs to the thinness of her muslin habit-shirt—he would be better soon. And wouldn't I let her sit up, or take a turn whilst I spoke a word of comfort to the poor Fräulein, who was crying in

her room as if her heart would break?"

To all of which I answered that I preferred to attend upon my brother that night, and would see the Fräulein early next morning.

The night was long and painful. John had never been ill in his life before, which made it doubly hard for me to see him brought so low. Besides, I reproached myself deeply now for having acted as I had done. I could not help thinking that I might have saved a great part of this misery by giving him my hand once—when he was in Cannstatt; and I knew that he sought Hermine as the only being who would sympathise with him. I felt convinced now that it is never well to take justice into our own hands—that we can never be too merciful towards each other, seeing how much we are all in need of mercy from the only Im-

maculate One. Therefore, if the friend of my heart were again to sin against me, seven times, ay, seventeen times seven, I would still, before God and the world, keep him in his old place ; for it is never too late to temper our mercy with judgment, but we may often seek to cancel a harsh or unjust judgment, when the power of the whole world would not enable us to do it. And the remorse of a hasty verdict for guilty must be infinitely worse than any false verdict on the lenient side can ever be. I felt thankful that this mood came over me at the time when he most needed my forbearance. Who else in the world would care for him now ? Would not this last act of treachery fill even Ottilie's gentle heart with scorn ? Sophie, with all the pure hopes and joys of young motherhood in her breast, could hardly feel kindly to Marie's

deceiver, after having witnessed the ruin he had made of our sister's life. Carl must grow up looking upon him as his mother's worst enemy. The kindly Blums and Rosers would never open their doors to him again. And in England all doors had been shut upon us long since, for reason of our father's unfortunate and culpable speculations.

Cut off from home, wife, position, friends, hope, had John anything left to him but my affection now? Was I not his brother—his playmate—his earliest and dearest friend? Could I forget the ties of those early years when we had no secrets, and only quarrelled to be better friends after?

Would anyone stretch out a helping hand now if mine were withheld? I thought of the Kursaal at Homburg, and shuddered at the possibility of my brother being left without a single friend or home-tie.

Towards morning he slept tranquilly. When he woke the periodic attack of fever had subsided, and I saw that I was recognized. The old irresistible smile played on his wan lips—the poor thin hand was held out towards me—then, as if he thought that I would refuse to take it, was suddenly withdrawn and placed before his eyes. The humiliation, the implied desolateness, of the action, touched me more than any words could have done.

“John, be plucky, old boy,” I said cheerfully; “we’ll pull through this and all the other troubles in time. Shake hands.”

“God bless you, Hendy!—I—I thought you would never shake hands with me again.”

“Did the sleep refresh you?—is your head clearer, old fellow?”

“I think so—but I had horrible night-

mare all the time." He looked round anxiously. "Is it all true, Hendy?—is she here?—has she really done this, or have I been dreaming?"

"She is here, but we had better not talk of her, John. You are too weak to bear agitation—another time will be better."

He looked at me with an expression of hopeless sadness and perplexity.

"It is all my fault—entirely mine. You have thought so—you have not been harsh to her, Hendy?—you have judged her gently?—oh! tell me that you have judged her gently?"

His anguish-stricken face was more than I could bear. Turning away my head, I answered gravely:—

"Trust to me, John, in this matter; I will endeavour to do what is right—let us talk no more of it now."

“ I *must!*” he cried with a fearful energy, whilst he clasped his hands over his brow ; “ oh, Hendy, I think my head will burst, it throbs and burns so. I cannot say what I want for this throbbing—I cannot clear a single thought, and yet I shall never rest till you know all. Hermine is innocent—tell—tell Marie that I say it. Poor, poor Marie! has she been unhappy?—does she hate me?—would she forgive me if I were to die now?—does she know that I gambled? ”

He had worked himself up into a high state of excitement now, and with it came a slight return of fever and light-headedness. When it had gone off I withdrew myself from his sight, hoping that he would doze a little : but he seemed noways inclined for sleep, and lay with his eyes fixed on the window in dreary despondency—the more

dreary because I knew his nature to be a sanguine one. Soon he called me to his side.

“Hendy,” he said hesitatingly, “I think, if you give me a piece of paper, that I can write to Marie. I must let her know the truth, for Hermine’s sake—she is too noble to tell it herself and lay all the blame upon me.”

“There is little to tell Marie that she does not already know, John. Wait——”

“But,” he continued with pleading earnestness, “Marie never can know all except through me—she can never forgive us whilst the knowledge is kept back from her.”

I did not wish to lead him on to false hopes of any reconciliation with Marie. Nothing in extenuation of this last cruel step could ever give the lightest hope

of that, and it would be only unkindness to deceive him into believing an impossibility. I therefore merely said :—

“Let it be to-morrow, John. You over-rate your strength ; you cannot hold a pen now.”

“To-morrow!” he moaned, wearily ; “it is so long till to-morrow ! A day is too long for Marie to believe that !”

Here we were interrupted by the Doctor, a brisk little Jew, who recommended remedies innumerable, but went away without specifying one. The grape cure, he should say, was just the thing for a fine young constitution like John’s—and so pleasant, too ! He had only to stroll in the vineyards three or four times a-day, and eat a pound of grapes each time. Or the milk cure might be preferred. Schlangenbad was the pink of places for cows—a month at

Schlangenbad, with new milknight and morning at the dairies, he would warrant as an unfailing toning-up of the system. Then the carboniferous and steely waters of Schwalbach were near at hand, and second to nothing in the way of healthy stimulant.

The worthy Doctor did not seem to think that intermittent fever required a little backing-up of the constitution, to bear up the attacks, before these pleasant remedies could be tried. However, I administered mild drinks and dozes of quinine regularly, trusting to quiet and a naturally fine physique for the rest.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN my brother slept a little at noontime I sought Hermine. Her room was a small and dull one, looking out on the garden. The blinds were partly drawn, and the aspect of everything was cheerless in the extreme. I found her sitting by the table, with her hands clasped over her face, and she did not look up till I spoke. Then she rose, turned white and red by turns, finally sat down, trembling in every limb.

“ I hardly thought you would come, Hendy, though I have been listening for

your steps since daybreak. I could not sleep all night; I have tasted no food since I left Cannstatt; I am too miserable to cry. Before you speak to me, remember how wretched I am!"

"We are all wretched, Hermine."

"You mean that you are all wretched through me? I know that, but you might have been more wretched still, had—oh! Hendy, must I tell you the whole fearful, fearful story?"

"I know it already."

She looked up with a vague expression of hope, that died away as soon as it had come.

"And you have no pity, no pardon for me? Will you throw me utterly off? Shall I be shut out from all that I once had, that every woman has, but the most abject? Will no one who knew me before speak to me or recognise me again? Am I *disgraced*,

Henderson?"—and she shuddered—"do you remember those cruel words that you spoke to me once in the spring—you said that if I did this thing all the women in Stuttgart would catch up their skirts, lest they brushed against me, as I have caught mine when passing fallen women in the streets? Oh! Hendy, do not tell me that I am classed henceforth with these!"

She walked to and fro in a wild agony that spent its strength soon, and left her weak and fainting. Then she sat down, as if hardly able to speak.

"Is there *no* hope?—will not Sophie believe the best? She loved me—she will soon have a baby of her own, who may grow up to be a woman, and to cause her grief—Sophie will soften to me, Hendy—you cannot be so hard as to forbid her loving me, in spite of all."

I held out my hand.

“No, Hermine, lost as you are to others you shall never be lost to us. I could not sleep at night if I thought that Sophie was sleepless for thinking of you. I could not help loving her more for any love that she may henceforth show you; in sickness, in health, you shall always have a home that is open to you—you shall not throw yourself upon the world, because you have been driven to it by our coldness or our unkindness. And God help you, Hermine, that is all the hope and comfort I can give.”

For some minutes she sat looking into my eyes, as if trying to discover some hidden hope there.

“Is it really so terrible? I feel as if I must be dreaming. Lost, did you say, Hendy?—lost means fallen, wicked, does it

not? Tell me the whole horrid truth at once. Shall I never be able to take the position that I have hitherto held in society again? Will not people recognize me as a gentlewoman?"

I shook my head sadly.

"But I shall live down the opinion against me in time, Hendy. When the world sees that I voluntarily resume my old place, it will gradually come over to my side. You do not mean to say that, in the face of every proof of my innocence, people will still wilfully believe in my guilt?"

"I do not wish to reproach you, Hermine, but if you recall the steps that you have taken you will hardly condemn a verdict found upon them. Think for yourself."

"True, true!" she cried, broken-heartedly.

"I would console you if I saw a way,

my poor child. I cannot lead you on to false steps; for in these cases, Hermine, there is no appeal to inner motives of action, no palliation allowed for temptation, or the force of circumstances. Any woman who lowers herself to such a level—whatever her qualities of mind or heart, whatever her rank or youth or beauty—is at once stamped with a mark not easily got rid of. Do not think me hard—I would willingly spare you.”

She started up and faced me with a daring brightness in her eyes and flush on her cheeks.

“I will not bear that mark undeservedly—you must help to vindicate my honour, Hendy,” she said in her old defiant manner. “Had I really come here with the love in my heart that a woman feels towards her lover—had I really so far betrayed my

mother and you as to throw off all dignity, self-respect, decency and duty, for his sake and for his love, I could have borne the scorn a hundred times; but as it is, as I am utterly innocent in the spirit, though I may not be deemed so in the letter, I will fight for my reputation, inch by inch ! ”

“ One moment, Hermine,” I said with agitation, “ look on my face, place your hand in mine. Answer me truly before God—did you, in coming here, come to your lover—did you give up all to be his only, his in sinfulness and in shame—but his only, in heart, in soul, in body ? ”

A wild, wonderful light danced in her eyes, a radiant smile of hope and joy illumined her face. She caught my hands and clasped them eagerly in her own.

“ I answer you truly before God, Hendy, that my hand is as clean as Sophie’s—that

whatever blind passions filled my heart once, they have been fought with, prayed over, kept down (I would say conquered if I could, but I will speak the truth), kept down, Hendy, till they have almost seemed conquered. I was mad once, I know that; I loved your brother with the one love that a woman has to give, and has to give but one time in her life; I let all my pride and all my peace be subdued by the master feeling, but I never let it lead me into one thought or intention of dishonour. I came yesterday, not to save my lover—for he is true and noble, Hendy, and has never been my lover—but to save one who had been injured by my love, one who otherwise ought to have been my friend and protector.”

“Thank God, thank God for this, dear Hermine! There is yet hope, then, for Marie, for John, for you, for us all!”

“Oh! Hendy, could you think me capable of such sinfulness?”

“What else did you allow me to think, Hermine?”

“But there were no proofs. It was hard of you to judge me without a hearing.”

“Proofs were not wanting on the wrong side.”

“I know it—I know it,” she answered sorrowfully, “but I saw no other way to save him. I dared not appeal to you. What could I do? Whom could I trust? And when a woman loves wrongly and recklessly as I have done, Hendy, she grows so used to despair, that the terrors of disgrace seem as nothing in anticipation. I thought that if I could once cancel, or go some way towards cancelling, the evil I had done both him and her, I should be made happier by it than any good love of another

man's could ever make me. I thought I should be indifferent to what might come after. But we are weaker than we think, Hendy. Now I feel as if the evil incurred were greater than the evil avoided—I grow selfish, and forget everything in the contemplation of my own ruined life."

"Has Aunt Carline told you about the money?" she added, whilst her cheek crimsoned painfully; "does mama know of it?"

"Carline concealed nothing from me, but I withheld the knowledge from Marie—it was as well to spare her all that I could, Hermine."

"How good of you! I wonder, Hendy, if any one will give me half such an affection as that you give my mother—I would rather have it than the deepest love-passion now."

Her face drooped dejectedly. I saw her brush away the quick-falling tears.

“But I must not give way—the worst is not yet over, and I shall want plenty of courage to bear it. If I were only clear from these horrid Frankfurt recollections, I think I could look forward to the future with patience. Oh! help me, dear Hendy, I might have had a lighter heart now if your help had been asked before, but I felt so strong in my own self-government that I feared nothing—nothing till Ludwig Ries told me that my reputation lay in his keeping.”

“Ah! it is as I feared about that dangerous man.”

“Has he misled you already as to the purpose of my flight?—he is depraved enough to do it. Did he tell you of having my letter in his possession, and of the use to which he put it?”

I narrated my meeting with Ries, adding,

“I was told in Frankfurt last night, by a person who knows him well, and has every opportunity of studying his actions, that he purposely entangled John’s affairs so as to get you here, hoping, after that mischief, to do more, by bringing you together, and then making a market of his trickery!”

“Wretch! villain!” she cried, indignantly. “What else did you hear? He did not tell you, I presume, that he enticed your brother on to high play, lent him money, then came upon him with warrants, finally sent him off to prison.”

“To prison, Hermine?”

“Yes, to prison, where he might have been still, Hendy—where he might have died of this fever, had not I risked all. Stay, hear the rest, and then judge me as kindly as you can. It was then that Ries possessed

himself of the letter. I do not know the particulars—perhaps he searched your brother's room when he was gone—perhaps his clothes, or the letter may have been lying about, it is impossible to tell. Anyhow he showed it to me at Cannstatt."

"You saw Ries at Cannstatt, Hermine? Oh! why did you not consult me, who might have done all this without any risk or harm?"

"I should, perhaps, had you not been so severe before. But, Hendy, hear me to the end. Ries showed me this letter, and also his deed of arrest upon your brother for the sum of five hundred florins. He told me that he was very ill, dangerously so—that that there was no hope of release unless the money came in immediately. He also"—and as she spoke she blushed to the roots of her hair—"laid before me all that he knew of

my former correspondence with your brother, and he threatened to expose it if the debt remained unpaid."

"If you desire a kind intercession on my part you must be perfectly candid, Hermine. You speak of former correspondence with John, and yet you tell me that we are to believe in your innocence. I do not wish to be harsh, but I confess that my faith is shaken in you by this last disclosure. When did this correspondence begin, and why? If you did not regard him as your lover, surely the answer is difficult both to be said and to be credited."

Her fingers plucked nervously at her dress, and it was some minutes before she spoke again.

"Ask John to show you those letters," she answered coldly. "I do not expect acquittal till I am proved innocent. Think

over the circumstances a moment, Hendy, and you will not wonder at my hardihood, immodesty, call it by what ugly name you may. I loved your brother, and for that reason he was turned off by his wife, his brother, his friends. It is in the nature of a woman to be generous, and I thought less of myself than of him. I conceived it possible once to give up everything for him—to make him happy by my love, in spite of the sinfulness of it, and the retribution of it. But it was not in that frame of mind that I wrote to him. The madness passed—he never knew it—he never shall know it!”

“He knew that you loved him, Hermine?”

“He knew that I loved him. He could not help knowing that. I *could* help telling him what a word of his might have drawn from me once—he did not tempt me then, Hendy—and, thank God, I was saved!”

She dashed away a few tears and continued in an eager voice :

“A less generous man would have dragged me down to ruin with him—I was so weak, so lonely, I loved him with such entireness, that he could hardly have been blamed for the deed. Oh, Hendy, if my mother still shuts her heart against him now, she is no true woman.”

“And the letters?”

“The letters were such as any woman might write to her brother or to her sister’s husband—you shall judge of them for yourself. Was I so very wicked in writing them, Hendy? Remember his isolation and my own wretched remorse. Can you wonder that I felt as if I was atoning in some measure for the misery I had brought upon mama and upon him, by holding out a little hope and a little consolation, by

keeping him still linked to his old life and his old ties, by letting him feel that he was not utterly out of the reach of sympathy. Can you wonder, when a time came that he was ill, in prison, and forsaken of all—when no finger was raised to help him, and the means lay near me to do it—can you wonder that I acted as I have done? And if I say, Hendy, that in coming here yesterday I came with no thought that taints a girl's mind—with only remorse and penitence in my heart for the love that such sharp suffering had burnt out—if I say that I only came here hoping to save him from the worst, to save him from degradation, from ruin, from death perhaps—to save him, Hendy, to *her*, will you believe me, will you give me the credit of at least one noble aspiration, and one act worthy my mother's daughter—will you acknowledge me as her

child, dear Hendy?—will you stand by me and not feel ashamed of your generosity?—will you give me your hand and let Sophie give me hers, however others may blame you?”

Her voice broke down now, but her face was calm and hopeful; it grew calmer, hopefuller, when I took both the trembling hands in mine, and said,

“It was brave—it was womanly—it was noble of you, Hermine! You shall never want a champion whilst you cancel your debts so generously. Trust to my friendship and to Sophie’s love that the sacrifice has not been made in vain; and if we are baffled—ay, a hundred times, dear—we will try a hundred times more, and win our cause at last.”

She had been so much tried, and looked now so utterly worn out, that I thought it best to leave her for the present.

Exacting from her a promise to lie down and rest, I resumed my old place by John's bedside. Need I say how much lighter of heart than when I had quitted it an hour ago?

CHAPTER XIII.

I FOUND John awake, and looking a little less feverish. An expression of relief came over his features when I entered, as if his thoughts were not pleasant companions.

“Have you been to her?” was his first anxious question.

“Yes. She has told me all—far more than I was prepared to hear, even after my interview with Ludwig Ries, John.”

He looked at me searchingly.

“It was a blind step, but a noble one.

To save me, she has done what can never be repaid, either by myself or by another. Oh! Hendy, how can I act, so as to show my gratitude to her, and yet convince Marie that I am, and have always been, true to my wife?"

"On your conscience you say this?"

His pale cheek flushed, but he replied, in a calm voice:

"On my conscience, Hendy. If I ever had a disloyal thought, it came in a time when I was maddened by her unforgivingness—as I deemed it. God knows she had cause for anger, but I thought that my fault was not too great to be forgiven. It is impossible, Hendy, for a man to be entirely indifferent to the love of a young, beautiful girl like Hermine. If I felt the temptation, and overcame it, did I not still prove myself faithful to Marie? Oh! we might have

been spared all this misery had she only given me hope!"

"Everything may not be lost yet, John. She is too tender, too loving, to be relentless always."

"I try to think so, but it is difficult. One word from her, one kind message then, would have set me straight in life; a kind message from *you* would have been something, Hendy; but I was cut off from all that I had loved in the past, and when this is the case one has no heart for the future. I hated to think that I should live long. Night after night have I walked up and down my solitary room, thinking of her and of you and Sophie, in your happy home, with children lying on her bosom, or clinging to your knees, separated from me by a mark on your forehead, that their little innocent hands might touch unconsciously."

“It never can separate you from me or mine, John ; see, the scar is a very slight one now, and no one—not even Sophie—ever learned, or ever will learn, how it came there.”

“You are a good fellow, Hendy, bless you!” he answered, with filling eyes. “I should like to have your home open to me if I never have my own again. I think I should grow more patient if some one cared for me, and made me welcome. Oh ! it is dreary to be an outcast from one’s home and friends ! Marie could but forgive me if she knew all that I have gone through since we parted : first, I grew desponding and morbid, then I grew indifferent and reckless, and, in this last mood, chance led my steps to Frankfurt.”

“Tell me your story from the beginning,” I said. “However much I have added to the bitterness of all that you have gone

through, I think our hearts are still in the right place, old boy? You forgive me?"

"If you did the same a hundred times, Hendy!" he cried, heartily; "no, no, it must be more than one misunderstanding that could turn me against *you*. Well, you wish for my story—it is not a pleasant or a profitable one, and I would rather not tell it. But it is only just that you know all.

"When I left Berlin in that fit of gloomy restlessness which led me to quit my position there so madly, I hardly cared whither I set my face. By some chance I remembered an unfulfilled dream of my schoolboy days that I thought would give me the excitement and change that I stood so much in need of. This was a walking tour through Switzerland, and I set off by way of Basle, walking and riding alternately. At Bruchsal, however, an inexpressible desire seized me to see Marie

before going farther. I hoped that she might relent to me—or, at least, that she would grant me an interview. In this hope I walked from Ludwigsburg to Weiler, and from the Wirthshaus sent a short passionate letter of intreaty——”

“You went to Weiler? She never told me of it.”

“The letter was returned without a word,” John continued, with a burst of bitter feeling. “Oh! she must have hated me in her heart to do that! Can you wonder that, in my frenzy of isolation and disappointment, I went on to Cannstatt—can you wonder that I sought in Hermine’s eyes the comfort denied to me in my wife’s?—or, if you are stronger and wiser than I, condemn such an act as sinful folly, you must, at least, acknowledge my temptation to it. I saw Hermine in the Bath Gardens.”

“And you had no idea that I witnessed the meeting?”

“Yes, she told me next day, Hendy. I shall regret my journey to Cannstatt as long as I live. Hitherto I had felt fascinated by Hermine’s fresh loveliness and vivacity, and had struggled against the fascination with all my powers of self-control. Now I allowed the unlawful feeling to take possession of my whole being—I could not, and would not rid myself of it. I confess to you that at Cannstatt—and at Cannstatt only—I sinned towards Marie in a thought. But I never for one moment entertained the idea of proving a false husband to her. Even when I saw that young girl blush and tremble before me, and knew the reason—when I was most certain that had I tempted her she would have fallen—I never weighed her happiness or Marie’s despair

in the same balance. When we met we did not meet as lovers, and we parted with the understanding on both sides that we must not meet again. I spent two or three months in Switzerland ; learning how easily one may live by one's wits so long as one is indifferent as to company and provender. At Zurich I gave an organist and his wife lessons in English, for which they stuffed me with cheese and soups, and were so grateful as to turn out of their own bed in order that I should not sleep over the cows. At Strasburg I fell in with a Jew merchant, who hired me as his English correspondent, at a salary of twenty francs a week ; but he turned out to be a trafficker in dirty money speculations, and I made my salaam at the end of seven days."

"Hermine was not in correspondence with you then ?"

He took a small packet of letters from under his pillow, and handed them to me.

“She only wrote five letters to me, and four are here. You must read them, Hendy, for they will prove her innocence better than any explanation of mine can do. I received them at Frankfurt—but not till I had written first to her.”

His brow flushed as he continued to look at me earnestly.

“When we parted at Cannstatt she made a promise never to withhold her friendship from me if I needed it.

“‘I am happy,’ she said, ‘and have no fear for the world’s thought or say of me—if you become more lonely, more wretched than you are now, and feel the want of such sympathy, and such love as Sophie might give you, ask them of me. It is through me that you have lost all, and whatever I

can do to atone for so much unhappiness I will do gladly. Never feel that you are alone in the world.'

"Oh, Hendy! a girl of Hermine's spirit must have been very desolate to do this, and I must have been more than man to reject her sympathy when utterly deserted by all who once cared for me, and, worse still, deserted by my better nature. It was from Frankfurt that I wrote to her, when the fearful passion of gambling had eaten like poisoned fire into my brain, making me regardless of my duties as a Christian and as a man. No one can enter that Kurhaus without being tainted in some degree by its vile atmosphere—the place is so immoral, so exciting, so sensual—that it is impossible to keep oneself pure. Everything appeals to the lowest instincts of our natures, and is yet so cloaked over by

what is enticing and absorbent, that one is glutted in before there is time to hesitate. I would not promise you to forbear playing were I in the Kurhaus now, even after all this degradation and misery. Do you remember our drunken frolics at college, Hendy, in the wild days?—how we drank on, and on, and on, knowing that the nausea, and headache, and heaviness must come after, yet unable to restrain? Gambling is a beastlier intoxication; since a man may get drunk occasionally, and yet be a man of honour when he is sober; whereas a gambler must be hopelessly bad in heart and in soul. He can no more think honest thoughts or dream honest dreams, than a kleptomanist can keep his fingers off the goods on a shop-counter. It is horrible, Hendy, to feel that you are sinking slowly, but surely, into the depths of

degradation ; to lose piece by piece, every reverential feeling for women, every human interest, in the one debasement of sense, and the one hungry hankering after money.

“I did not love Marie then. I did not love Hermine. I was lost to any passion that would have been a virtue in an upright man. Oh! Hendy, must I tell you the deadly thoughts and dreams I had in those evil days? How I entertained the idea of enjoying a wild, wicked happiness with Hermine—how I shut my heart to every good remembrance of you and of Marie—how I wished that Hermine were less pure—how I tried, and tried vainly, to make her so?”

He dashed away some miserable tears, and continued :

“Hendy, I think I was mad. I could not reach the idea of a God to pray to—I

thought that the devils had the best time of it, and resolved to throw in my lot with theirs. And I did. I played, and drank, and——”

The words seemed to burn his tongue. He looked at me wildly.

“Is it possible that I—I who once had Marie’s love—who have slept with my head on her pure bosom, who have taken to myself all the sweetness, and trustingness, and joy of her dear love—is it possible, Hendy, that I could stoop to be so much of a beast? Can men who have once loved good women, ever find it in their hearts to touch other women’s hands, and not shrink back polluted? Will a life-time of devotion and tenderness wipe away such a stain? Oh! old boy, I would give ten years of the happiest existence with Marie, could I meet her as you will meet your Sophiechen, without a

shadow of taint on your married love! But Hermine was the salvation of me. Her calm, sweet letters of reproach and counsel stilled the fever by which I was consumed. Every word of hope, every whisper of comfort, stung me into the bitterest shame that a man can feel. Not one of her letters came that did not undo some fatal work of debasement. I began to think again of the old days, to contrast Hermine's patient suffering of trouble, her unmoved steadiness in the right path, with my own reckless yielding to the bad influences around me. Still I had not sufficient strength of mind to leave the Kurhaus. Hendy, if you have a son, never let him go near a gambling-table—never let him fall in the way of such men as Ries.

“Your face grows dark when I mention his name, but he is no worse than ten out

of a dozen men who are always ready to fraternise with a reckless and unlucky man. It is not Ries, it is myself whom I have to blame. The gambling-table is never so disguised by attractiveness but that the vice and the wearing passions of it speak out plainly, and had I roused myself into self-government Ries could have obtained no hold on me. Once in his debt, I was at his mercy. You know the rest.

“What I hate Ries for is his behaviour with regard to Hermine. He deserves severe punishment for possessing himself of my private letters, and using them so vilely. And had he not doubled the sum by unjust interest, Hermine would have been under far less temptation to come here. My firm belief will ever be that he thought to abet a *liaison* between us, in order to answer his own bad ends. When Hermine came, the

fever was so strongly on me, that I knew nothing till I found myself here ; or you may rely upon it that I would have baffled him by refusing to be released by her money. The weight of that debt is like lead on my conscience."

"I will be your creditor instead of Hermine," I answered hopefully. "I have a little sum laid by that will just ease your mind on that score."

He breathed a sigh of relief.

"You are very good, Hendy. As soon as I can get out I will work at a desk like two, to repay you. You must help me in other ways. Hermine's fair name cannot be left in that man's hands. There is a letter of hers in his possession, which, put to a foul purpose, might do her irremediable injury. You must aid me in getting that letter. And, Hendy, you must plead Her-

mine's cause to my wife. I will not save myself at her expense. Promise me to stand by her."

I promised. He lay still for some time with a weariful smile upon his lips. Then he drew from his breast Marie's portrait, and kissed the case again and again.

"I have not dared to look at her face for months," he said in a low voice, "though the portrait has never left its old place. Oh! Hendy, do you think she will ever let me call her 'wife' again?"

"I hope so—I trust so."

His fingers worked nervously at the clasp. The case was open now. His tears fell thick and fast on the beautiful, earnest face.

"Oh! Marie, oh! my wife!" he cried passionately, "you will never know how I have loved you!" And he kissed the passive features with such kisses as we give to

those who are dead and can never be ours again.

When his passion of grief was over, he called for paper and pen to write to her. At first his hand shook terribly, but soon it gained strength by practice and eagerness; sheet after sheet was written over closely and folded, till his head drooped wearily on the pillow, and his lips turned white with exhaustion. I gave him some wine, but though the letter lay unsealed till post time he did not regain strength to add another word; it went to Marie as he left it, and with it went two long epistles of my own, and the ferventest prayers for an answer that should make us all happy.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day I called upon a very worthy family, with whom I had made some acquaintance during my previous stay in Frankfurt, and procured lodgings in their house for Hermine, till some better course could be decided upon. Meantime she wrote herself to her old schoolmistress in Paris, asking her to find a suitable home for her there, feeling with me that for the present she could not return to Weiler.

“It may look cowardly, Hendy,” she said, “but it is less on my own account

than on mama's that I decide to keep away. I am young, and shall be rich one day; the storm would soon blow over my head on account of these advantages, but the first stings and sneers of a contemptuous set of people are hard to bear, and would be doubly hard to her were I present. Now that she has Carl with her, why must she remain at Weiler? Let them all—mama, Carl, and your brother—go to Berlin for a year or two. Let people say their say and forget us. For my own part, I think I shall be happier in Paris or in London, where I can go into society and be amused. I am no heroine, Hendy, and cannot show a brave face upon an isolated country life, which is so unnatural to me. I am less frivolous, less fond of pleasure, or rather less capable of pleasure than I was a year ago; but I have no interests, no pursuits at

home to fill my mind and my time. I *must* take a new turn in life, or I shall become a Romanist like Carline, or marry some second Prince Heutingsheim, and hate myself ever after for having done it. All that I have gone through, Hendy, has only developed more deeply the real idiosyncrasies of my nature—nothing can ever alter them. I never shall be like mama. I never shall be able to endure such a life as she has endured of late—it would have driven me into gaiety and worldliness. Oh, Hendy, I am very weak. Had it not been for the terrible remorse that mama's white face visited upon me, I think I should have risked all and ruined all. You must know, Hendy, that something has always stood between mama's heart and mine—we never feel to each other as mother and daughter should, we never love each other as mother and

daughter love—I am afraid we never shall. But mama is so beautiful and so stately, so self-contained, that one is perforce obliged to kneel down to her, as it were. Had she been a shade less dignified, had she been in the slightest thought a coquette, I must have wronged her bitterly, and made my own life ever after miserable. She was perfectly guileless and unsuspectful—perfectly tender and faithful, and she saved me. Oh, you must bring them together—you must make her happy.”

I left her at the door of her new abode, and betook my way to the Hoch Strasse. Ries was out, but the sharp-faced little linguist seemed noways disposed to part company without a *tête-à-tête*. Her husband being from home, she said, gave us all the better opportunity to discuss the Herr Ludwig's secrets; for he was so fastidious,

the simple fellow, and quarrelled with her six days out of seven, because she chose to keep a sharp look-out on her neighbours.

“I happened to be on the Main side last night,” she added; “and, having found out your address from Ries, called in to ask after the poor young gentleman’s health. I rejoiced to hear that he was a trifle better; and the young lady—have the two really made up matters between them?”

Thinking that the active little lady had most likely a tongue to match the quality of her ears, I took care to insinuate the necessity of caution.

“We must have silence on the matter, Frau Schmidt,” I replied, eyeing her keenly, “however dearly we pay for it—you understand. This young lady’s family is well known among the upper classes here; of course it is expedient to nip the story in the bud.”

She stroked her elbows reflectively.

"I can answer for myself and for my Moritz—but the Herr Ries is the difficulty. Have you considered him, mein Herr?"

"Yes, and I think the difficulty resolves itself into one point. There is a letter in Ries's possession, without which he is powerless. You must get that letter."

"Get that letter? You are joking, mein Herr." And she laughed pleasantly.

"Well, why not? It is worth thirty-five thalers to me. Thirty-five thalers is a very good price for one letter, Frau Schmidt."

"A very good price indeed," was the laconic answer.

"Do you think it an adequate price?" I asked.

"Well, mein Herr, you must go to figures for that. If the Herr Ries finds that his

pocket-book and letter-cases have been pried into he will most likely seek other lodgings, and at this season of the year we might wait two months perhaps before meeting with a successor. Herr Ries pays us two thalers a week for rooms, linen, and cooking, and an extra thaler for suppers, which he often omits to eat—eight times three are twenty-four, leaving only eleven thalers as reward money. I think it is hardly worth while to risk one's character and one's lodgings for eleven thalers, mein Herr."

Her eyes twinkled at the idea of the forthcoming bargain, and her fingers instinctively slipped into her pocket, as if jingling the money in anticipation, little Israelite that she was.

"Suppose I say forty-five thalers, Frau Schmidt. I assure you that the letter is not worth a groschen more. Indeed, the lady's

friends have only empowered her to give forty."

I fancied that perhaps some possible remunerations in another quarter might be revolving in her mind. This remark clinched the matter.

"Wait a bit," she replied, and ran into the next room.

Almost immediately she returned bearing a letter, the handwriting of which I recognized at once.

"I have had my eye upon it for some time," she said, with a smile. "I felt sure that it would prove useful in more ways than one before the matter ended. Take it and welcome, mein Herr. It is always pleasant to finish a job."

Taking Hermine's note from the envelope, I inserted in its place a folded sheet, inscribed to the following effect:—

“*Herr Ries will do well to busy himself with his own affairs in future, or, at least, to leave the Fräulein W——’s alone. Any attempt to bring the matter forward again will be resented by an especial inquiry into his own practices of dishonesty, and by a judicial proceeding against him for his unjust seizure of interest on moneys borrowed by Herr B——.*”

“You will kindly put the envelope where you found it,” I said, handing to her the envelope and forty thalers, which she had earned so well. “Good evening, Frau Schmidt, *Guten Appetit*, and thanks for your services.”

With what relief I scattered Hermine’s letter, in a hundred fragments, over the Eschenheimur Chassé! One glance at its contents was enough to convince me that, though Hermine had spoken truly, they were such as Marie could never forgive.

Whilst according to the imprudent and unhappy girl all the lenience possible, I felt that her fault must be atoned for only by the bitterest tears and loneliest hours of her young life. Thank God, through all, for averting the worse sin and the worse punishment.

CHAPTER XV.

AT last the morning came on which we might expect Marie's letter. John was so far recovered that he could walk from one end of the room to the other without assistance, and, much to the little doctor's delight, could eat and drink a little. But he looked sadly brought down. Severe illness and severe mental anxiety had so altered his cheery manliness of face and figure, that one would hardly have recognized him.

I dared not give him too much hope. Marie loved him—Marie was breaking her

heart for him, but her pride had been hurt, and her trust had been violated. I knew that a hard answer would cost her dear. I could not decide that love would win.

Early on the morning so full of fate to my brother and sister, I heard John moving in his room, and before the clock struck six he came to me dressed as if for walking out.

“It is three hours now till the letters are delivered,” he said, falteringly; “but with your strong stick I can manage to get to the Post-hof, Hendy, where the clerk will give me my letter for a tip. I cannot wait till nine.”

“Are you mad, John? To go out on this damp morning is to give yourself a very fair chance of a freehold estate in the churchyard—I’ll go myself, and bet you a thaler to be back in half-an-hour—toilet and all.”

He consented, though very unwillingly. In the twinkling of an eye I had jumped into my bath, in another into my pantaloons, in another down the street. It is a fast half-hour's walk from the main side to the Zeil, but by immense exertions I accomplished it in a quarter. To no purpose, however. The grumbling clerk had enough to do, he said, without delivering separate letters at that time of day; and, moreover, the bags were already sorted.

I went home all red and puffy, to meet a blank face of disappointment, yet in my heart glad that the fateful moment was put off.

Warm rolls and coffee were brought up at seven. He made an effort to eat, and to speak cheerfully.

“If she breaks with me utterly, Hendy, I shall go to St. Petersburg, as I once

thought of doing ; but if I am recalled, we will lead the pleasantest life near to you. I am quite determined to procure some appointment, and *she* would like it better. Oh ! dear old boy, she must relent to me, I cannot think otherwise."

Then followed a long silence, during which he moved restlessly from one window to another, looking anxiously into the street, though he knew that the postman was not yet due. Then he tried to read—to play an air of Schubert's—to write to Sophie ; finally he sat down, thinking, thinking.

At last I caught sight of a glazed belt and military hat crossing over to our door. A heavy, quick step sprang up the staircase, and a little ring at the door caused both John and myself to rise from our seats.

"Alles?" I asked, with fearful interest,

as the man put a single letter in my hand.

“Alles, mein Herr.”

John followed me inside without a word. I broke the seal, conscious that he was looking over my shoulder with tight shut lips and strained nerves.

“Dear brother and friend,” the letter ran, “I write to you in deep sorrow, only consoled by the thought that you have all along been faithful and staunch to me. Whatever I say on the strength of this great friendship, promise me that you will not be pained by it—that you will put confidence in my decision. Hendy, I fully and freely forgive your brother.

“But we must never meet again. Will you judge me harshly for this, Hendy, you who love me with the tenderness of a woman—with the devotion of a lover? If

you do, you have never quite understood me.

“He has done me too much harm that I should risk my all in his hands again. You may urge that he is virtually true, that he has always been virtually true, but my faith in him is shaken, Hendy, and can never be made whole again. The suffering and the sorrow of such an awakening from a happy life will soon have passed over; but they have changed my nature more than I can tell you—more than you would believe. They have changed me so much that I cease to marvel and regret the change—even for Carl’s sake. Sometimes I wish to live a few years longer, but he might grow cold to me, or cause me pain too. Anyhow I can hardly care for my life as your brother has made it.

“We are at peace now, Carl and I. Let us continue so. Oh! Hendy, it is hard for

me to write this to you who are his brother; but by telling a half-truth I must only hurt you more by-and-bye. Tell him that all is over between us, as much as if I were already dead. His tenderest love could not add a joy to my existence; he could take much away from its calmness by reminding me of a time that I pray daily on my knees to forget. I hope he may forget it too.

“As I write, Hendy, my soul yearns to say one kind word to him, for your dear sake; but I dare not—oh! I dare not, though my tears fall fast, though my heart is breaking. Act a brotherly part to him, teach your children to love him, but never, never mention his name to me again. All my old indignation and anger are gone. I have no spirit to resent an injury now, and, perhaps, it is better so. I might reproach myself on my dying bed for a harshness that could answer

no end, that could only fill his heart with bitterness against one he used to love. Do not let him hate me. Only tell him that I am no longer his wife.

“Hermine’s old home is open to her, but before entering it she must promise not to come between Carl and me. If she will do this, and will content herself with the quiet life at Weiler, let her come quickly. I cannot love her as I love Carl. Perhaps she hardly expects it of me. Forgiveness, kindness, sympathy, she shall have, and indulgence to the utmost. Can I say more? Come hence soon, dear Hendy, and help us to forget this trouble. Sophie is writing so long a letter to you that it must wait till to-morrow, as the post-bag is ready. Mine has cost me a sleepless night, and shall not cost me a second. I have no time to write more. Adieu.”

“That is a hard letter,” said John, in a cold voice; “a letter that no woman could have written of her husband, had she once loved him.”

He took it from me, and crushed it in his hands, with a masterful white face. The blow had been sharp and sudden, but it had not paralysed him.

“She says her heart is breaking; through every word and line you may trace the woman’s tenderness kept down by an effort that almost kills her. Oh! John, I cannot despair for you yet!”

“Hendy, you speak kindly, but without reason. Has she not said, as plainly as words can say, that *I* have caused all her unhappiness—that *I* should spoil her peace now? No, no, it will be better to accept the words as she means them. Everything is over now between us!”

He walked backwards and forwards agitatedly.

“Yet, Hendy, I think she might have been more generous. Good God, does a woman think of dignity when she loves in earnest? Did Hermine think of dignity when, with disgrace staring in her face, she came here to save me? Is that the best and deepest love which can suffer nothing, pardon nothing? Have I not suffered humiliations and indignities for her sake? Because I married a woman who was several years older than myself, and holding a better position, did not all the Stuttgart world come down upon me with jeers and taunts? Will not Hermine have to suffer bitterly for all that she has done on my account? Ought there not to be forgiveness and generosity unbounded between husband and wife? Ought anything short

of absolute unfaithfulness ever part them? Heavens, Hendy, it is mad, unnatural, unwomanly of her to play with a man's affections like this. She does not know the harm she is doing. She does not know the misery."

He covered his face, and muttered in a low, broken voice,

"Oh! Marie, you will repent of this to your dying day. A time may come soon for you to repent of what you can never undo—and I—I must learn to hate you, Marie, since you have been so cruel!"

I would fain have consoled him, but saw no way.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARIE'S letter proved too much for the little physical strength of which John was master, and, in spite of his outwardly brave bearing, the iron entered deep into his soul. That night he suffered a relapse ; fever and its accompanying delirium came on quickly ; so quickly, that the next day he was pronounced to be in great danger. I wrote at once for Sophie. The nurse, however kindly in intents and purposes, was no more fitted for her office than a rattling cart-horse is fitted to draw a nervous patient's carriage.

She stepped across the room with the noise of a sledge-hammer, bawled in the patient's ear like a public crier, and brought up broth and gruel as if she were attending upon a sick cow. When I saw how utterly essential quiet, judicious nursing was in my brother's case, I was fretted beyond endurance at the good Ernestine's method of treatment. I could administer food and medicine myself, but I felt the necessity of a woman's gentle ministrations in a hundred ways, and urged Sophie's speedy journey to Frankfurt. To Marie I merely wrote word that John was fearfully ill. I did not say that her letter was the cause of his illness; I left her to imagine this, and hoped she would soften to him, now that any moment might part them solemnly and for ever.

I cried like a child when Dr. Goldschmidt

told me not to hope much. He was so young, so generous, so handsome; so fitted to be loved by the world and to love it, so capable of a healthy happy existence, so ready to enjoy all that was good and pleasant in life, and reject all that was rough—oh! must he die? Must he die in his prime manhood, and miss the proud and peaceful possession of a home in which he should be master and lord by the right of dear love only? That pleasant smile, those cheery features, those supple, athletic limbs, was there no help for it but to give them up to the cold hand and to the still home?

No help—God forgive me—Thou knowest how I tried to remember a Help that is ever present.

In his wanderings he spoke of old, old times. He fancied himself at Beechley, the

home of our childhood. We were birds' nesting together in the plantation, or flying kites on the lawn, or fishing in the lake.

"Come, Hendy," he cried, "it is twelve o'clock, and lessons are over—do leave that book—can't you see how the sun shines?—we are sure of getting fish to-day—it's very disagreeable of you to delay so, Hendy—I'm sure the book is as dry as ditch-water."

My heart ached to think that perhaps Sophie's children might never know their father's playmate, and I wondered whether the whole world would ever give me a friendship so dear as his.

Sometimes he would start up wildly and say—

"Hendy, he lies, he lies!—Hermine is as pure as an angel—do you not believe me, Marie?—oh! Marie, do not come near me—do not come near me, I say!"

All that day I never left his bedside for one moment. When night came, I permitted Ernestine to watch for an hour whilst I wrote to Marie. It was a desperate letter, saying in every hurried sentence, "Come to him!"

Towards morning John grew calmer, and though I was perfectly watchful if he spoke, I felt conscious of dozing at intervals. Waking up from one of these hasty snatches of sleep, I saw that I was no longer alone. Did I dream, or did I really behold Marie sitting by the bedside?

She moved, and bent forward.

"Hendy," she whispered, pressing my hand, "take some rest. You have done your part, and now you must let me do mine."

"Sophie?"

"Sophie is well, and begged with tears

to accompany me, but she should not try her strength now, it might do her harm and another who is to come. Am I not the fittest person to be near him, Hendy?"

"You will never leave him again, Marie, only promise me that?"

"Hush, we disturb him. Take some sleep, dear brother. We will talk to-morrow."

I would not leave her, but lay down on the floor, where, thanks to my tough habits, I slept as soundly as on an eider-down bed. Whenever I woke up, Marie was moistening the sufferer's lips, or bathing his brow, or resting his weary head upon her bosom. A true woman is invariably a good nurse, and never had man so sweet a nurse as Marie. By day-light I could hardly believe myself in the same sick-room; silently she had removed all that was unpleasant to the

eye or ungrateful to the smell, had sprinkled chloride of lime on the floor, and set the door ajar, thus letting in a stream of pure air, and purifying the atmosphere of taint. Then there were no ugly medicine bottles or discarded saucers of camphor-water lying about, no glasses of yesterday's lemonade, or dusty trays—all looked bright and cheerful and wholesome.

Everything must be done by her own hands. I missed her in the evening for a quarter of an hour, and on looking through the glass door saw her bending over the kitchen fire (the peculiar copper fire usual in Germany), adding small pieces of fuel gently to the blaze, so that the invalid's broth might be made quickly and without smoke. With her slender white fingers she washed the medicine glasses, set the room in order, and prepared his drinks. Then

she found out a hundred ways of giving him ease and comfort—discovered by some delicate instinct his slightest wants and wishes, and ministered to them quickly and unobtrusively.

He grew calmer when her cool hand was pressed on his brow. She sat for hours relieving him in this way, keeping the disengaged hand on a marble vase, so as to maintain a constant coolness, till I saw that, from maintaining an upright position, she was ready to sink with fatigue. His hands were fearfully hot, and he seemed to feel refreshed by having them bathed and fanned. She would never let me do this, though I entreated her.

“No,” she would say, calmly and decisively, “I must do everything for him, Hendy—even your right to that is second to mine.”

The first day passed without any conversation taking place between us, beyond ordinary consultations and remarks concerning our dear invalid. He wandered a good deal, and at these times Marie's brow contracted, with an expression of sharp pain, for Hermine's name was oftenest on his lips. When his thoughts seemed to run into another and purer channel—when he appealed passionately and piteously to his wife, his Marie, his darling, large tears streamed down her pale cheeks, and she kissed his unconscious face again and again.

We shared the night watches between us—I could not prevail upon Marie to go to bed, or even to take rest on a sofa that I had procured for her. Through all those hours of suffering she never left him a moment, and sometimes—was it my fancy only?—I thought he recognised her pre-

sence. I named this fancy to her, but she negatived it with a pitiful smile.

“You are always trying to console me, Hendy,” she said; “though I can hardly be consoled even by you now.”

Then she whispered fearfully—

“If he should die without knowing me again. Hendy, pray for me!—I think I could not bear *that*.”

I did not sleep that night, being too anxious and overwrought, but I wrote a long letter to Sophie by snatches, telling her of every change and symptom of change; also a note to Hermine, who as yet had heard nothing of this trouble.

By daylight Dr. Goldschmidt was again with us, bringing, at Marie's entreaty, the resident English physician, who looked very grave, although he inspired us with a little hope.

“In such cases as these,” he said, “we can do nothing but brace up the system just enough to give it power over the disease. The disease will have its way; I place some reliance on your brother’s fine constitution, as being able to withstand it. The turning of a feather on our side will save him to us. One moment’s neglect in administering stimulants may ruin all.”

Slowly and mournfully, like so many funeral bells sinking, sinking into the stillness of hearts with no hope, the weary hours passed till the crisis came.

It was now five days since Marie’s arrival, and beyond snatches of sleep taken in the daytime and hasty meals of bread and wine, she had taken nothing to fortify herself against so much trial. On the sixth night, that night which would leave her desolate, or give us all hope and joy greater than we had

ever known, nature gave way at last. She did not sleep, she shed no tears, but lay on the sofa, pale, motionless, deathlike—as one whose great joys and sorrows are already over—as one who had wept too much to weep again.

Dr. Richardson came in during the evening, and promised to repeat his visit every four hours. He was one of those quiet, gentlemanly men who take the place not only of a family doctor, but of family friend, bringing into the sick-room a host of unspoken sympathies and consolations, in the glance of his friendly eye, and in the pressure of his cool, firm hand. Seeing Marie so utterly prostrate, and yet so resolute against taking any repose or remedy, he poured out a glass of wine, and raising her head as if she had been a child, compelled her to swallow it by that calm

authority of manner which prevails far better than words over us in times of mental and physical debility.

Till midnight there was no shadow of change. He lay, as he had lain all day, now moaning and restless, now motionless and deathlike. Once, seeing him in such a fit, I started up in horror, thinking he was dead. But when I touched his arm he muttered inarticulately.

Is there some unreachable mystery linking human and material life? Does some hidden and delicate chain connect the awakening of a world from deathly sleep, with the quickening of a mortal flame that had well nigh blown out? I know not; but in that solemn hour in which the great birth of another day was taking place, my brother's face changed, and came back from death to life—from eternal silence to the sounds that

he knew and the hearts that loved him. With the faintest glimmer of dawning day, with the twitter of waking birds, and the whisper of leaves—as slowly as these sights and sounds, the change stole over him. First his eyes grew clear and calm, then a breath of life-like colour swept over his pallid and hollow features—finally a faint smile, but a smile that told of life, rippled his lips, and he knew me.

“I must have been ill very long to have had so many bad dreams,” he said. “Where am I, Hendy? Is it many months since—”

At the sound of his voice Marie started to her feet. With a rosy glow on her cheeks, with the light of love in her sweet eyes, she stood transfixed by mingled fear and joy, longing to throw her arms around his neck—dreading to take so much happiness too soon. He could not see her where

he lay, and she placed her finger on her lips to enjoin my silence.

John raised his head as if to watch my face, adding—

“Have you been kind to Hermine, Henry? I feel as if she had been here. Can she have been so good, so noble?”

Marie turned deadly white, and pressed her hands tight against her heart. Half by a look, half by a gesture, she forbade me to speak; then, with a face that I shall not forget to my dying day, she turned away, and, steadying herself by the chairs and table that stood near, stole noiselessly out of the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MONTH has passed, and Sophie stands, with both my hands in hers, on the Cannstatt platform, where not even the presence of the fierce-looking guards hinders my little woman from an explosive—

“Oh! Hendy, my dear, dear husband!”

“My own love!”

And we blunder into a *Gepäck Ausgabe*, where we have no business whatever, and behave there like a couple of sweethearts instead of sober married folks. At last, when the Sophiechen really believes her

senses, we walk home without a word, for nothing so incapacitates the tongue as an overflow at the heart.

After a little talk, purely egotistical, and a little dinner, in which my wife had out-Sophied Sophie—(dear ladies, I am no gourmand, but, if you would keep your husband good-tempered, give him dinners after his own heart)—we strolled into the Bath Garden and had our talk out.

“I don’t know what all your letters have been about,” said Sophie with an arch smile; “certainly, they have told me next to nothing of what I most wanted to hear.”

“Did you get tired of hearing about yourself, Frau Professor? To the honour of womankind, I’m glad to hear it!”

“I didn’t say so, you stupid man,” she replied; “and now begin. First of John.”

“He is quite well, though not so strong

as he used to be—but the journey will brace him up, and the change of scene will do more than anything else for his spirits.”

“When is he coming?”

“My dear love, you misunderstand me. All hope of a reconciliation between John and our sister is over now—Marie’s return must have told you that.”

Her blue eyes opened wide with indignation and disappointment.

“Hendy, you don’t mean what you say?”

“Should I joke on such a subject, Sophie?”

“Then I am angry with you—out of patience with you!” she cried, with a pretty little show of temper; “you should never have let Marie leave him without an explanation—you should have compelled her by main force to hear him. I could manage things better myself, though you possess

more sense in your little finger than I do in my whole body. To think that you, who are so clever and book-learned—who know Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, and Spanish—who read every dry book under the sun—to think that you, Hendy, should make such a blunder, a blunder, too, that is not easily to be mended. What were you thinking of?"

"I am thinking, just at present, that though your forehead is smooth, no one would believe so, my dear, who saw that frown on it now; and that though your lips are like cherries ordinarily, I should be the last person to pluck them till the sun comes out."

It came out at once.

"You dear old thing, give me a kiss, and I won't scold any more; but listen and say Amen, as you hold that all good wives should."

“In the first place, then, Sophie, John is gone to St. Petersburg, for at least two years——”

“To be eaten alive by bears, or lose his ears and his nose by the frost. He couldn’t have chosen a pleasanter prospect, in *my* opinion, dear,” said provoking little Mistress Sophie.

“He has procured an admirable introduction to a large mercantile house there, through Dr. Richardson, the Frankfurt physician. Englishmen are at a high premium in Russia now, as all sensible men know; and his post is one of trust—his salary is to be good from the first. I think he could hardly have done better, Sophie.”

“Sensible men of course see things differently to silly women,” rejoined the spiteful little woman, with admirable point; “but if I may be allowed just to do more than

say my soul is my own, I should suppose John's chances of happiness to be much greater had he kept at home."

"He has no home. Be logical, my love, or we shall never get an inch further in the following out of your ideas."

"The long and the short of which is this, my most sensible husband: John and Marie are husband and wife; through all and in spite of all, they should be brought together, and," she stamped her plump little foot on the ground determinately, and threw an uncommon dignity into her simple, girlish face, "they *shall* be brought together, if my name is Sophie Brown."

She was serious now. We both looked into each other's eyes, each understanding a mutual feeling, to which neither could give expression in words. When she spoke

again, her voice was subdued, and a tear stood on her cheek.

“I cannot be happy even with your love—even with the hope of that love to come, Hendy, whilst they are divided,” she said, sadly.

“Dear, we can do nothing at present; trust your husband, Sophie, for having strained every nerve in so good a cause. Let us hope for better times to come.”

“You urged upon Marie the fact of John’s innocence—you set before her the plain facts of the case, without sparing Hermine?”

“But Hermine was really innocent, Sophie; you must remember that in going to Frankfurt she entertained no worse thought than that of freeing John from difficulties. It was mad, unwise, reckless of her to the utmost—it was not sinful to Marie——”

“I do not believe in her innocence. Women see clearer through these matters than men, Hendy, and I can understand no girl in Hermine’s position acting as she did.”

“Hermine is unlike any other girl, my dear.”

“Even if I did believe her to be innocent, I should never forgive her. Women have no right to place themselves in such suspicious circumstances. I do not wonder at Marie feeling towards John as she does, if both you and he have been freeing Hermine at his expense. Besides, there could be no hope of a reconciliation without an interview. Oh, Hendy! surely there was some way of persuading Marie to listen to him when she was so near?”

“To what use, when she had lost all confidence in his affection?”

“Never mind; he might have regained it.”

“Not from such a woman as Marie, Sophiechen. Beautiful and noble as I know her nature to be, she is still incapable of forgiving an injury; and put it in what light you will, John has injured her. Could you forgive me, had I injured you in the same way?”

She nestled on my shoulder.

“It’s too dreadful to think of, Hendy. Perhaps I should feel very hard and bitter to you whilst you were away, but if you came to me, and smiled your old smile, and took me to your arms in the old loving way—oh, husband! could any wife help forgiving then?”

A long discussion followed on the same subject, which came to an end in a satisfactory though undignified manner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON the day following my arrival home, I called upon Carline, being anxious to fulfil my promise to John before leaving Cannstatt finally. She did not receive me ungraciously, but I was shocked to find her so much changed since our last meeting; the events of the last two months seemed to have added ten years on to her head, and even some of her old haughtiness had gone.

“I hardly expected you to come,” she said, with a smile that was difficult to read; “you are not a placid man, and my last

reception might well have offended the meekest temper. But I am glad to see you—even for your own sake, I should always be glad to see you, Mr. Brown. Do you bring me good news?”

“Hermine is well,” I replied; “and I hope has found a home suited to her in Paris; she will not return to Weiler for some time.”

A shade of pleasure made itself apparent, in spite of an effort to hide it.

“She will not return to Weiler, and why? Surely, now that I have withdrawn myself from the quarrel, Marie Weiler and her daughter might agree to differ. It does not argue well for Marie’s sense or affection, Mr. Brown, that she turns off her own child when the whole world is set against her. Do you know how terrible Hermine’s story has become in the universal Stuttgart

mouth? No one—I question whether even your father-in-law—believes that she went to Frankfurt with any other intentions but the most culpable. Where is the argument against such a belief? She goes to Frankfurt—to her avowed lover—to her mother's husband — and the three — husband, wife, and daughter—are henceforth parted, apparently for life. I ask you, Mr. Brown, if one impartial man in ten would give a momentary doubt as to Hermine's guilt?"

"You do not question her innocence yourself, Fräulein Weiler?"

Again the same unreadable smile.

"It is permitted to women to judge their own sex by a harder canon than men use, and I should be sorry to say in plain words what conclusion I have come to regarding the whole matter. Anyhow, Mr. Brown, my single opinion can have no weight in

that of society, which is as unmerciful to Hermine as it is to all other women who bring themselves under its judgments. I have remained at Cannstatt to show my contempt both of the judgments and the judges; and by so doing I serve Hermine, whether I wish to serve her or not."

"She is grateful—she loves you through all!" I replied, earnestly. "Believe me that the remembrance of your love and kindness has been one of Hermine's sharpest pangs—and consolations. When one suffers so deeply we must give all the lenience and pity in our power; and Hermine's sufferings have been greater than the share of most women. Remember, Fräulein, that she loved my brother—loved him with all the impetuosity and passionateness of her nature."

"Do you believe what you say?" asked Carline, with kindling eyes.

“I believe that she loves him as women only love once in their lives—as women love who commit desperate crimes for their lovers.”

My words seemed to agitate her strangely. She turned pale and bit her lips.

“Is she very unhappy?” she said at last, in a low voice; “is she losing the life, and freshness, and joy of her youth?—is she wasted and careworn?”

“She is painfully changed.”

“Marie Weiler may have pleasant dreams as well as myself now!” she cried. “Do you remember her cruel taunt? Well, we stand on even ground at last, and I am glad of it. She has reaped a rich harvest of retribution for all the harm she did me long ago, and she must bear the misery of it, as I bore my misery, alone. Mr. Brown, you have always done your extreme duty

as a tutor, and as a gentleman, whilst under my roof; you have always shown me respect and courtesy, but I know that, through all, you have thought your thoughts of me. I know your friendship for Marie to be an infatuation—can I doubt that your enmity to myself is measured out less liberally? Be candid; you think me a hard, bad woman, do you not? A woman who has brought unlimited and unmerited suffering on an angelic nature—a woman, in fact, to fear and to hate?”

“I have neither feared nor hated you,” I replied, coldly. “In our mutual relations of workman and employer we never clashed or came in each other’s way. With your private affairs I did not concern myself, Fräulein.”

She caught up my words fiercely.

“We did not clash or come in each other’s

way, because we were wise and had politic reasons for refraining. But there are no reasons now ; nothing from your lips, nothing from mine, can raise a quarrel between us—therefore, Mr. Brown, you might imitate me, and be open. Do you think I have not read your face a hundred times, when it has declared war upon me, plainer than words could speak? Good sense could give you the command of your lips—it could hardly teach you to conceal thoughts from eyes as sharp as mine. You have angrily and deeply resented my conduct to Marie? ”

“That I do not wish to deny.”

“Thank you for the straightforwardness of the answer. I respect you for your honest championship in the cause of your friend—I respect you because you never cringed to me, or tried to win my favour

by any treachery to her ; and for reason of this good opinion, Mr. Brown, I have come to the resolution of mentioning a subject to you which I have never confided to living creature. You look surprised. Is it so extraordinary that I am ambitious of righting myself in your estimation, now that we are parting? I think not."

She walked backwards and forwards, with her face turned from me.

"Put yourself in Marie's place, only slightly altering the relationship between her and Hermine. Fancy them sisters, or cousins, or no relations whatever. Would not Marie hate to the death a younger and fairer woman who should wrong her so deeply as Hermine has wronged her now?—would she ever forgive her?—would she ever be expected to forgive her? No! I say no! a thousand times. There is no

pardon, no pity, no relenting, on the part of the woman wronged, whatever may happen to her who has wronged her ; and since Marie Weiler robbed me once of all that Hermine has robbed her now, I have hated her all my life, and will hate her till I die!”

There was a strange, quiet passion in her voice and eyes as she said this, but she kept it down.

“Granted that Marie was as innocent as you say Hermine is now, could that innocence, or semblance of innocence, restore me one iota of all I had lost? Granted that she showed herself humble and penitent as Hermine shows herself to be, could that mend a broken heart or build up a ruined life? All the innocence, all the tears, could do nothing ; but time pays our debts for us with a liberal interest ; and to Marie have come at last the dark days and

the hidden despair which came earlier to *me*. Am I very wicked that I do not shed tears for her, Mr. Brown? Ought I to play the hypocrite, and kiss her with a Judas kiss, because her time is come? No, no! we know each other better, Marie Weiler and I—we will be honest to the end.”

She turned sharply on me.

“I think we were made to be friends instead of enemies, since we are both so proud and so strong. Through all I have admired Marie more than any other woman in the world. You may tell her so if you like. Had she shown herself weak and woman-like I should have scorned to torture her—I would have thrown her from me like a wasp that had stung once but could never sting again. As it was, we fought long and desperately; but she gained the victory, and in my soul I honour and love her for it. I

believe that she would have died without seeing Carl, rather than see him through any intercession made to me. This is the spirit I like to find in a woman, Mr. Brown ; and, having found it in Marie Weiler, I am ready to shake hands over all that is past. She will never do that. But she cannot hate me worse for acknowledging myself to be defeated. And now the thing is over, you will not betray my confidence—you will justify me in your thoughts, my friend?"

"Most willingly."

"That is like you English, short and simple, implying no more than you are ready to give. I have something else to say to you. I know Hermine's allowance to be small during her mother's lifetime, for my brother was not rich, and the estates go to Carl. Will you transfer to her a yearly sum from me anonymously, or as coming

from her mother, if you like—but in such a way that she cannot refuse it?”

“Certainly.”

“The money shall be delivered to you by my banker in Stuttgart, and you shall be spared all unnecessary trouble. Thank you, Mr. Brown. But your complaisance is to submit to another trial. Believing you to have a real and unselfish regard for Carl and Hermine, I have nominated you as my trustee for all moneys I may leave to them at my death. Are you willing to undertake the duty?”

“Yes, Fräulein.”

Her face turned paler as she advanced to me with outstretched hands.

“Perhaps I may never see them again—perhaps the time may come when even a love like mine could help or comfort them. Oh! they are very dear to me!” and her

voice shook as she spoke. "Promise me not to forsake them so long as you live—promise me to stand by them whatever may happen, and to keep them from sorrow if you can."

"I promise all this faithfully," I said, with earnestness.

She let go my hands, and crossed herself devotionally.

"The Holy Virgin bless you for all kindness shown to my children," she murmured, in a broken voice. "Now leave me—I need to be alone."

I went away at once, having first deposited on the table the packet of money I had promised John to leave with her by way of payment for Hermine's debt.

CHAPTER XIX.

MOST of my readers know what it is for the scattered members of a large family to meet after some great trouble has happened, say the loss of one most dear to all. How, in such circumstances, we try not to notice the empty chair—how we bravely place ourselves in the vacant place, thinking, by such bravery, to show that we do not miss him—how we say merry things with sad eyes, and laugh at them with hollow hearts, thinking always of him whose voice and laugh we can never hear again—how we

go to bed thankful that the day is over, and pray and weep in secret.

We were all cheerful at Weiler on the first evening of our arrival, though we knew well the dreary, unspoken thought of each other's heart. The Colonel was there, with his nervous little wife and Ottilie, besides two of Carl's friends for the Christmas holidays. Seldom had the old Schloss seemed livelier. Marie welcomed us quietly and joyfully, as was her wont—asked Sophie a hundred trivial questions about her Cannstatt housekeeping—described to me every detail of her proposed Christmas festivities—and, when dinner was over, joined the boys in a noisy game of billiards. She steadfastly avoided a *tête-à-tête* with me. Once I caught her eyes fixed on mine with an expression of the deepest, most concentrated interest; but it was only for a moment,

then she turned away hastily, as if unwilling to meet my gaze. In spite of her assumed activity and cheerfulness, I could see that she suffered intently. She could not blind eyes so clear as mine, however much she succeeded in blinding others.

The next day passed, and the next, and found us no nearer to the truth which lay at each other's heart. Marie continued to play the host admirably ; made all sorts of delicacies in the morning, after the manner of German *chatelaines*, put her visitors in the way of enjoying themselves throughout the day, and formed plans for their evening recreation, in which she always joined, if not with light-heartedness, at least with serenity. Doubtless this constant employment of time was the best remedy possible for a trouble like hers, but she looked very fragile and wearied under it often.

We had been about a week at the Schloss when I received a letter from John. The spirit of it was so manly, so self-reliant, yet so touching and subdued, that I resolved to show it to Marie. No words of mine could have described equally well the strength and the sweetness that his nature had gathered from all the trials through which it had lately passed. Without any apology, therefore, I put it into her hand as I said good morning.

We were alone, and she made no effort to conceal her agitation.

“Hendy, why are you so cruel, you who love me?” she exclaimed, with quivering lips. “If you could only know how useless such efforts are to him, how painful to me, I feel sure you would refrain. Dear Hendy, I am trying to regain my old strength, do help me—you must help me!”

“You will never regain your old strength while you are so lonely, Marie.”

“Do I complain of loneliness? Do I sigh and weep all day that you should speak of it? I have Carl to be with me always, and I want nothing more; the whole world could give me nothing more.”

“Carl cannot be with you always. Have you ever thought of the time, that must come sooner or later, when you will wake to find Weiler as desolate as it was before he came?”

“I may never live to see such a day; and if I do, oh! Hendy, is it kind of you to spoil my happiness by holding up so dreary a future? I am trying to live in the present—I am not very strong—perhaps I shall only enjoy Carl’s love for a few years—leave them to me in peace.”

She sobbed piteously.

“Dear,” I said, with great tenderness, “because I love you, and see that you are trying, vainly trying, to forget the past, I make this effort—not only for John’s sake, Marie, dearest, though I know that the sun will never shine on his manhood again, so long as he is exiled from you, but for your own sake, for your own peace, and happiness, and well-being. You are very brave, Marie, and those who do not love you so well as I love you might fancy you were cheerful and hopeful at heart, as you sometimes seem to be, but I am not deceived. Hold out your hand to him before your heart is broken!”

“Hendy, I can never hold out my hand to him till I have forgotten all!”

“Not when he is lonely, and wretched, and loves you?—not when he has suffered such heavy retribution, and stands in such need of consolation?”

Her answer came slowly and bitterly.

“I can give him no consolation. Let him seek it from her who gave it to him before ——”

“You are unjust, Marie. Remember that he did not seek consolation from another till driven to desperation by your refusal to see him.”

“It is useless to say any more,” she cried, passionately and proudly; “you utterly misunderstand my character, Hendy, if you think that I can take up this tainted love as easily as I should pick a glove from the mire. I gave him all that a woman has to give; he abused the gift—can he reproach me for withholding my hand now? If he reproaches me, he is less generous than many a worse man than himself. Hendy, will you make your peace with me, and promise to forbear such attempts in future?”

John and I can never, never be husband and wife again! Love him for his own sake, and me for mine, or choose which of us two you will forsake for the other."

"Must it be so, Marie?" I said, sorrowfully; "is there no hope?"

"No hope, dear brother."

I had not kissed her since I claimed my sister on her wedding-day; the last kiss that I pressed on her brow unsealed the former and happier one. She was my friend now. She could never be my sister again.

After Christmas, Sophie and I settled ourselves in a bowery little nest, within a few hundred yards of the old Schloss, and I resumed my tutorship. Nothing could have been more suited to our wants and habits than this same modest home, which lay like a lark's nest amid green leaves. It was

picturesque, too, with its high gable and pink walls, bordered with flowery ornamentalions in worsted-work style; besides having quite a little patrimony in a potatoe garden behind, which I cultivated by way of counteracting my sedentary habits and tendency (alas! vulgar again, dear lady-readers) to grow fat. Then to an active little house-keeper like Sophiechen, the very fact of having a house of one's own was a delight never to be made too much of; what looking-glasses the tables and chairs were turned into by her perpetual polishing—what white floors and transparent windows we had—what heaps of crochet table-cloths and sofa disfigurers in the shape of kaleidoscope-patterned cushions were exposed to view in our best parlour—what rows of glasses and tea-cups on the chiffonier! And on Sunday, when the Herr Papa came

over, bringing with him an old military friend, or the ladies, was there ever such coffee as Sophie set before them? Were there ever fritters so crisp, and potatoe salads so superb? Never to *my* taste, certainly, and I wonder at my wife's perfections every day.

When spring came, and laid in Sophie's arms the little snow-drop for which we had all looked so long and lovingly—our quiet happiness had only one cloud on it.

"Hendy," said the young mother to me, three days after her baby was born, "may I give him what name I like?"

"Certainly, Frau Professorin; as the young gentleman owes so much to you, no one can have a better right to the privilege."

"Do you know what name I have fixed upon?—can you guess?" she asked, with her blue eyes full of tears.

“I think so. You would like to call him after our brother.”

“Yes,” she added, with her face bent over the baby; “I always wished to give our first child *his* name if it was a boy. I think perhaps Marie’s heart may soften to her husband when she grows fond of our innocent little one. Don’t you, Hendy?”

“My dear love, bless you for the thought!” and we settled the matter at once.

So, after Sophie had come down-stairs, her blithe bonnie self again, and the Name-day was fixed, Otilie took upon herself the task of telling Marie. When she laid the wee thing in her arms, whispering what its name was to be, she said that Marie made no answer, but hung over the child and wept quietly.

She never called him by her husband’s

name. Even when a second little blossom had taken baby's place, and our sturdy diminutive John began to babble in quaint monosyllabic English and German, with her he was always "Bube" (little boy), "Liebling" (darling), or "my child," which latter title she chose oftenest of all.

We knew that she loved him passionately nevertheless. He had John's open brow, John's curly brown hair, John's taking smile, and John's loving, roguish, irresistible eyes. We were reminded daily of our brother by a hundred ways and looks of the child's, but we felt that Marie was reminded of him always. She never seemed happy without the boy, and would sit for hours watching him at play, whilst large tears gathered in her eyes; sometimes the repressed feeling conquered, in spite of all efforts at self-control; and many a time

have I seen her leave the room with heaving bosom and averted face.

The smoothest currents ever seem to flow swiftest, and in our quiet routine of duties and pleasures, seldom disturbed even by a small obstruction, a year hardly seemed longer than a summer day. We had little variation, except short holidays to Cannstatt or Wildbad during the bathing season, visits from quiet old-world people like the Rosers, summer pic-nics with Stuttgart friends, and Volk's Fest gaieties once a year. But no life could be serenener than ours, though the serenity was sad at all times. We could never forget the two whose places ought to have been among us. We could never make a holiday that was not marred by the remembrance of them.

Hermine wrote seldom, though her letters were ever cordial. The first part of her

stay in Paris was far from happy, owing to some rumours of her past life having reached the circle in which she had placed herself. But her youth, her beauty, and her vivacity soon disarmed slander, and after a few months she described herself as entering into society with a resolve to forget the past.

She was right in saying to me at Frankfort that nothing could alter her nature. Whatever she had been in the past she must be in the future. Surrounding influences might greatly tone down or heighten the impulsive recklessness of her temperament—they could never wholly subdue it. Haughty, prone to hasty judgments and hasty actions good or bad, daring in her ideas of right and wrong, strong in her own faith and believed power of self-mastery—most weak, most womanly under tempta-

tions—most weak, most womanly in her aspirations after love and tenderness—she must go on wounding, healing, smiling, weeping, satirizing, caressing, to the last.

Once I had hoped otherwise—it seemed then possible to me that one whose theories of the good and beautiful were so avowedly high, would aspire to reach them after having proved the fatal uselessness and hollowness of any joy or privilege, however delicious, that has been unlawfully obtained. I could not fancy Hermine thinking in one sphere and acting in another.

But she did this, and she went on doing it blindly all her life long. She never imagined that she was deceiving herself—that she was, in reality, less pure, less amiable, less loveable, less lovely than other women, because of so one-sided a mode of existence. She never dreamed that she

suffered more than most women, because she thought nobler than she acted—because she lived up to a lower ideal than the cherished ideal of her mind.

Therefore, disappointment and bitterness went far to spoil a life that once promised to be so smooth, so fair, so enchanted; and Hermine, with her rare gifts and rare opportunities, won far less love and sunshine than fall to many an ordinary nature.

John's letters gave me infinite satisfaction. He was receiving the very best training in the world for a character like his, and the training began to show its rich fruits early. At last the bad education of his luxurious and purposeless life in England had met with counteractions sufficiently powerful. Laborious work, that was neither mechanical nor uninteresting—constant intercourse with solid, energetic,

prosperous men—daily initiations into a society neither literary nor aristocratic, but intelligent, gentlemanly, and liberal-minded, acted upon by the unvarying influences of the bustling, practical, zealous life around him—he could hardly have been put to a better school. Being young, well-educated, and agreeable, he was cordially received into the circle of English mercantile families resident at St. Petersburg; and having once obtained such a position he did his best to maintain it. He acknowledged to me frankly that, for the first time in his life, he looked upon business men with respect, and felt no shame in his calling.

“After all, Hendy,” he said in one of his most thoughtful letters, “all the wisdom of the world may be spoken in one word—*work*. I was a fool to think, as I did think often after my poor father’s misfortunes and

death, that because I had been reared as a gentleman, it would detract from my right to the title by putting my hands to honest, manly labour. The wisdom that I preach is not new to you, old fellow, who began to earn your own bread and butter, with the best grace in the world, as soon as the need came. But it has come as a revelation to me. I go to my desk every day with a feeling of self-reliance and independence that braces my nerves like a sea-breeze. True, I am only a subordinate, and work for paid wages, but so long as the work is well done the servant stands on the same ground with his master ; and, to the honour of the mercantile firms here, I say that I have always been as welcome to their houses as any other guest.

“Then the steady, wholesome activity of a city life invigorates my faculties, and puts

me on a level with other men. My sympathies extend to other nationalities and other politics besides my own. I unlearn daily some home-bred prejudice and some insular dogma. I am no longer tied to one interest and one principle. Hendy, all that I want now is *a home*. You say little of your own Sophie, of your boy, and of your wee Mariele. I know that you are intensely happy nevertheless, and are only silent because you would not dwell much on joys from which I am utterly shut out.

“Oh ! Hendy, when I think of her my fortitude gives way. There are some wounds which never heal, and she has wounded me deeper than she thinks. Had I loved her less by one thought, I must have hated her now for the ruin and desolation that she has brought on my life.

“Do your children prattle of me? Do they

ever mention me in their little prayers when she is by? So sweet, so loving, so tender as I know her nature to have been once, has it grown wholly cold, and hard, and relentless since? I think only a miracle could have altered such a nature. I think she must be my own Marie still. I love her as my own Marie, in spite of all! I shall love her so, Hendy, till I die!"

CHAPTER XX.

It is a drowsy, bee-murmuring, bird-piping summer evening, several years after. The old Schloss lies in a glare of red sunlight, which makes us draw the white curtains of the alcoved room, and listen in the cool shade to the flail of the flax-beaters and the droning song of the hay-women.

The day has been a busy one, for to-morrow Sophie and I quit our cosy lark's nest to begin life anew, and Carl enters the student world of Heidelberg; at last our packing is done; coffee and fruit are

brought up, over which we try to look brightly on the future, without too much longing for the past.

The children are very merry, and Carl whistles gaily from room to room, full of a boy's delight and restlessness on leaving home for university frolics and university honours. Marie cannot conceal her sadness. As to Sophie, no one knows what has come over the little woman. Throughout the day her actions have been extraordinary; first she makes a quince-cream and omits the sugar—then she cries and laughs all in one minute—then she scolds Mariele for doing no wrong whatever—finally she dances baby so vigorously, that it resisted with a most appealing wail and bent its little fists in her face.

Now, when everything is ready for our journey, and any sensible woman would sit

down and enjoy herself, she flits restlessly hither and thither, as if her soul's salvation depended on not remaining two consecutive seconds on the same chair. One moment she fetches baby from the nurse, the next she takes him back. Finally she seats herself at Marie's feet with the child in her arms, and bursts out crying.

"My dear Sophiechen," said Marie tenderly, "we shall soon meet again."

"I know that," sobbed Sophie; "and though I think I shall never love any other place so well as Weiler, I am not crying because we leave to-morrow. No, Marie, I am crying on your account."

Something seemed to rise in Marie's throat, but she managed to say with firmness,

"But, my darling, this is hardly a parting even between myself and Carl. The

terms are very short, and I shall spend many holidays at Heidelberg."

Sophie wiped away her tears and answered quickly:—

"Marie, when a child goes into the world he never wholly comes home to his mother again. If this baby were as old as Carl, and were leaving me to-morrow, as Carl is leaving you, I should not expect him to be quite the same on his return; the thought might make me sad for a time, but I should seek consolation where a true wife always seeks it, and never in vain."

It was to no purpose that Marie put up her slender hand. Sophie would be heard.

"Carl cannot be all the world to you, Marie. Why try to blind yourself to the truth? As surely as my boy grows up to manhood, so surely must he, sooner or later, tire of his old home, and make one for him-

self. Carl will not be failing in a son's duty by doing this."

"Sophie, I am very wretched. Leave me to my wretchedness!"

"No, I *must* speak, Marie. When a woman has children of her own she grows brave and bold, and loses all fear of other women—even if they are beautiful, and proud, and good, as you are. Were I not Hendy's wife, and the mother of Hendy's children, I should never have dared to say what I say now—I should never have dared to push myself so near your heart, Marie. But because I sit at your feet, and yet feel hardly below you—being so happy, so honoured, in my position of wife and mother—so secure in your love, since I am his brother's wife—so daring in my knowledge of your dear love for him—I do not shrink from your anger or from your displeasure,

Marie. Your life must henceforth be very lonely, but there is one who could make it blessed as mine is blessed. Will you consent to take such happiness from him—will you listen if he prays for a hearing?”

“Hush, hush!” cried Marie, brokenly. “Sophie, there is no happiness in the world for us like yours. I have lost all capability of love, all freshness, all joy now!”

“Love?—oh! Marie, not even on your wedding-day did you love John as you have loved him since—as you love him at this moment! When you have taken our boy on your knee, was it ever without a remembrance of your husband? When you have kissed his eyes, was it ever without thinking that the eyes were like John’s? Proud as you are, and self-governed as you are, you are still weak in the sense that I am; and if

John stood before you now, you would fall on his breast, and forget all ! ”

“ Never ! ”

“ If you did not,” cried Sophie, warmly, and still in tears—“ if you did not, Marie, you would prove yourself a less large-hearted woman than I take you to be ; you would prove yourself less worthy of love than I take you to be. It is God, and not us, with whom such judgments rest. He has done nothing for which he has not fully repented and fully atoned—nothing which hinders you from stretching out your hand to him, now that his love and protection might perfect both your lives. Will you not do this, Marie ?—will you not show yourself noble, and womanly, and forgiving ? Oh ! be true to your nature. He loves you, dear—he loves you so that his life has been, for years, a constant hoping against despair ! ”

Marie clasped her hands over her face, and sobbed aloud.

“But the despair is over now!” added Sophie, almost hysterically; “he is coming—he will soon be here—oh! sister, promise me that he shall not come in vain!”

“Sophie, it cannot, cannot be. John and I, having once lost faith in each other, must never join hands again. If I were dying (and I think I shall not live long, my Sophie-chen), I would see him for one moment, to show that I forgive him; but in life we are utterly, utterly divided!”

Sophie jumped to her feet in a passion of tears and indignation; then, holding her baby out at arm's length before Marie, she cried vehemently:—

“Dare you say this, Marie, you who are a good woman, who have had children of your own lying on your bosom? Are you

so proud in your self-righteousness that you assume to yourself the right that belongs to One only? Are you so hard that I must leave off calling you 'my sister,' and give all my affection, all my duty, to him whom you condemn so cruelly — and give it without regret? Oh, Marie! I may be very wrong, very wicked in my thoughts, but I must speak them to you before we part. If you reject John now, you reject me and my children—they shall never touch hands that were too proud to touch his—they shall never be caressed for his sake, whilst he is exiled. Choose, Marie: will you kiss my baby—or will you lose us all, and lose us for ever? ”

“ Hendy, is this true? ”

“ Hendy loves you dearly,” cried my little wife, before I had time to speak; “but Hendy puts too much faith in me, to doubt

that I say this without consideration, and without bitter necessity. Would he love me so well if I could sit tamely by and see you breaking your husband's heart, because he sinned once? No! I speak from my conscience, and before God, Marie; and I say, if Hendy sinned the worst sin that a husband can be guilty of towards his wife, when his heart returned penitently to his loyal love I would open my arms to him—ay, Marie, open my arms to him seven times—and so I hold it to be the duty of all true wives.”

My darling half advanced to my embrace, and half to Marie's.

“Will you kiss the child?” she said; “or will you let us leave you, never to come back again, Marie?”

The quiet seriousness of Sophie's voice seemed to impress Marie even more than

her former excited appeals had done ; she looked up with wistfulness, and reluctance, and trembling joy expressed in her sweet face.

“ Call John,” Sophie whispered, as she flung herself, baby and all, into Marie’s arms.

There was no need. He had been standing in the doorway for the last minute or two, and now entered silently. Four years give wonderful breadth, and fulness, and dignity to a man just passing into the prime of life, and certainly no woman could but be proud of a manly, handsome, pleasant fellow like John. His beard, too, of that brown, crisp, curly perfection which is so enviable to a beardless man like myself, added in no slight degree to the solidity and character of his face.

Marie rose to her full height, and for one moment regained her pale composure.

“Hendy, you should not have surprised me—I will never forgive you,” she said; but when she met his loving eyes, the anger and the pride went. Half-way, as a woman should—half-way, with one tremulous hand held out, with a subdued light in her eye and a fluttering rose on her cheek—she advanced to those strong arms, and to that eager heart.

“My wife!”

He claimed her so—as he had claimed her on their wedding-day. Could he have found a dearer or more honoured title?

Then he sealed that second holier marriage with a long kiss, and took her to his breast, to weep there.

Sophie and I stole silently away, feeling that we could take no part in their perfect joy. For hours we walked up and down the dusky galleries of the gaunt old Schloss,

talking in subdued voices of the days that were gone, and were too happy even with their sadness ever to be forgotten ; most of all of the sorrow that had passed utterly, and the joy that was come to repay all.

CONCLUSION.

IN the upper story of a very high house in the Schloss Strasse, Stuttgart, lives Herr Henderson Brown, Professor of Philology at the Royal Gymnasium, and instructor to the children of the Crown Prince of Würtemberg. I doubt whether the whole jolly Suabian land can show a blither being than this same Professor. He is a short, plump, blue-eyed man, with a healthy ruddiness of complexion, which he attributes in great part to early rising, and an excessive addiction to sausages and sour kraut—the

one being oleaginous and rotundifying, the other abounding in nitrogenous and purifying principles.

No man ever had a cheerfuller companion, or a more excellent *Hausfrau*, than is his bright-eyed little wife. She is never ill-tempered or low-spirited, this model little woman ; her soups, her fruit-cakes, and her cutlets are unrivalled ; there is not a bit of furniture in the house which would not serve the purpose of a looking-glass. She knits all the stockings for the household ; she has everything in its place, and a place for everything. Of her spectacled Professor she is mightily proud, as also of two grand works he has lately published in England, with small profit, but (we suppose) great renown ; nor is she less proud of a miniature Professor, who already struts round the room with a book under his arm, after

the manner of papa. Perhaps this little man's sister is papa's especial pet. She is called Sophiechen, and has the eyes, and hair, and smile of little Mariele, who went to heaven.

It is easy to tell that, though the Professor is an essentially happy man, he has at some time or other suffered deeply. Is it not often the sad life that goes far to make the cheerful man?

The Professor cannot forget the little child whom he had loved beyond his other children. Breaths from that innocent primrose life which never ripened to summer, come across his mind to purify it amid toil, and pleasure, and rest. Arch smiles, pretty prattlings about birds, and flowers, and fairies, the fanciful, lovely child-world, are wafted to him like waifs and strays from the silent shore on which she rests, and

keep his heart full of tenderness and love towards all other children, though none can be so beautiful or so dear to him as the one he has lost. Perhaps he loved her so because she reminded him of his sister Marie.

Not many visitors come to this quiet little home, but those that do come are lovingly welcomed, and always stay to coffee and Abendessen. The most frequent visitors of these, because the nearest, are the Oberst von Blum and his wife, who never fail to bring the children cakes and toys, and to their parents all the news and scandal of the Stuttgart world. On Sundays we always look for them after church time, when they come home to dinner ; and directly that is over, we set out in a drosky to some pleasant country place — sometimes to Degerloch, to get a peep at the Suabian Alps, and look

down on the capital lying so cosily in its vineyard valley—sometimes to the Silberberg, to eat fruit among the flowers—sometimes to meet neighbours, and drink coffee in the café gardens—sometimes to Esslingen, where the children are shouldered up the wearisome Burg steps, and sing and crow with delight when they get to the top, knowing that they are allowed to fill their pockets with apples and plums, under the eyes of the Burg-keeper's buxom daughter, who never thinks that they take enough.

The next visitors who come often are Sister Ottilie and her husband—for Ottilie married happily soon after little Mariele's death. Our brother-in-law, Franz Sax, is many years older than Ottilie; but his calm, grave character could hardly have been appreciated by any other woman so well. He is a learned man; wonderfully

visionary in most common-sense matters—a perfect child, in fact, except where philosophy, Hebrew, and Sanscrit are concerned; somewhat severe and dogmatical in his general views, yet, at home, loving, gentle, and placid always. They live at Heidelberg, for he is attached to the University there; and Otilie, having no children, gives all the devotion and tenderness of her heart to her hero.

John and his wife only spent a few weeks at Schloss Weiler after their reconciliation, and never returned to it again, save for short visits to Carl. They passed some months in Italy and England, which latter country had always been the *optata arena* of Marie's thoughts. Finally they made their home in Berlin. It was hard for us to be so far parted, but after all that had happened neither John nor my sister could get

up their hearts to enter the Stuttgart world again. Besides, he had learned the value and honour of work, and, with all his love for Marie, would not consent to receive bread from his wife's hand. So Herr Roser, being very old and infirm, willingly surrendered to John the management of his branch banking establishment in Berlin, which employment entailed upon him no more labour or anxiety than is good for any man.

Every summer Sophie and I spend our holidays with them, and return home full of new ideas and pleasant remembrances to brighten the working winter months. Their home is modest but elegant, and they choose their friends, not among the rich and the influential, but among the highly-gifted, the pleasant talkers, the enthusiastic artists, the happy thinkers, the energetic speculators, the ardent students. Such a circle cannot

fail to be attractive and elevating. You always find in it witty repartee, clever argument, artistic dissertation, playful fancy, and keen criticism, all softened down by wholesome common sense and large-minded charity.

They are happy. If occasional clouds pass over their summer day—who is without them?—and however heavy the clouds may be, love, pure, and tried, and perfected, shines through all.

Perhaps with a wife whose spring had been less saddened than Marie's, John might have led a more light-hearted life, but never one so good and so aspiring as it was with her. Perhaps an ordinary woman would have tuned his character to a commoner and less troubled music; but having once attained to the comprehension of a nature so fine, so sensitive, and so exqui-

sitely organized as hers, no other sympathy, no lesser love, could fill his heart. He passed through a fiery ordeal, as all must do who love one of higher character than their own ; but after much doubt, and sorrow, and fear, the delectable land of peace and trust was reached at last.

“ My wife bids me say,” he wrote to us, on the birth of our fifth child, “ that the name-day celebrations of the little Ottiliechen must take place here. You know, Hendy, how she dotes on your children, and we spend hours often in talking of their future prospects. She is quite determined upon educating her boy Jo, as she calls him, here, in Berlin ; and as to your girls, I dare say, if the truth could be known, she has fixed upon their wedding-dresses already. You lucky dog, to have five little ones, when *one* would make us too happy, Once I thought

that this regret would never wear off, but at last it is dead and buried ; for Marie is so occupied, and has so many interests out of her home and in it, that we are happy as we are. Carl is here, handsomer and wilder than ever, and delighted to think that he is eighteen. Marie is wonderfully proud of him ; but we have no jealousies or sore feelings about him now. We understand each other thoroughly.

“Marie has just come in with a princely cloak for the wee Ottiliechen to wear on her name-day, so Sophie must not provide one. She looks over my shoulder, and, like all ladies, must add a postscript. I believe, old fellow, that she loves you best after all. Write and say what day you will come, dear Hendy. Ottilie and her weighty Professor, dear wise man, have promised to join us—your boy Carl will

be here, and you must bring my youngest boy John—was there ever so happy a family gathering as ours shall be?

“John’s naughty sentimentality above makes me sentimental. Dear brother, and dearest friend in the world but one, you know all—can you doubt that we try daily to repay each other in love and duty for the suffering and the sorrow that cannot be undone? For the first time in my life, since early girlhood, I look on happy children or on quiet graves without envy. Only those who knew me as you knew me, dear brother, in my loneliness (and even you could not know the worst that had gone before) can understand my deep, tranquil thankfulness and repose. I think nothing but Death could hurt me now; and even Death were nothing in comparison with doubt and estrangement. Hardly you

and Sophie are more serenely happy than we two. This is old news, and yet I know that you love to hear it. God bless you both. Adieu."

There are two other friends, very dear, though not of our blood, who never come to Stuttgart without visiting us. When a letter arrives from the first of these friends, the Professor dances little Sophie above his head, crying out—

"Thy lover is coming, mein Herz, and thou shalt have a new white frock in which to receive him."

"If she does, Carl Johann shall have a new kittel as well," says Mama Sophie, almost spitefully.

The matter is ended by the children both having new clothes, to mama's satisfaction. The Baron Weiler, with his long fair hair and wondrous Goethe eyes, is a handsome,

talented, versatile young fellow, who embraces a new theory every year, and never changes his residence but he changes his hobby. He finds Schloss Weiler rather dull after Paris and Berlin, nevertheless he always spends *Herbst Ferien* there with the Professor's family, and has effected a great deal towards the improvement of the village. In spite of such temptations as usually beset a young, rich, and attractive man, his old tutor is glad to see that Carl has in no wise lost his boyish candour and simplicity of heart. Nothing delights him more than a cigar with the Professor, when the two will talk over philosophical speculation, foreign travel, politics, literature old and new, and of by-gone days.

I think the sudden death of her who would have died for him had some share in moulding the young Baron's character to

its changeful, doubting, impatient calibre. The shock struck so suddenly, so harshly, on his fresh young life, that ever after he connected an idea of painfulness with any kind of affection. Our darling's death affected him greatly, for she was a great pet of his; and often now, when romping with Sophiele, whom he calls his little wife, he will turn from her abruptly and say—

“Good God, Hendy, if the child should die!”

He enjoys life intently by fits and starts, but there is always a perplexity, a yearning after the unseen and unknown, in his views of it. When most happy, he must question his happiness—when in trouble he always seeks the cause of it in himself. He cannot take things as they are, and enjoy a harvest, however plentiful it may be, if the seeds were not sown under his own eye.

The Professor preaches to him till he becomes hoarse, with no effect; but Sophie laughs at her husband's dictums, and says slyly,

“Persuade Carl to marry, husband—depend on it, a wife's lectures would be ten times more acceptable and effective.”

And after-events proved that Sophie was right.

The elder of these friends is a fair, graceful woman, whose face tells you at once that sorrow has passed by there. Her husband never comes with her—they separated within two years after their marriage. Whether the fault rests most with the Count de Brousel or with Hermine, we never heard—we only know that she lives in Brussels, and enters sparingly into society. The Professor, who met her first as a blythe young girl, with the whole careless summer

of an untried life dancing in her eyes, never sees her now but he is more serious for days. He remembers that she seemed heartless to him in the first period of their acquaintance, that heedless sarcasms would flow from her lips, that more than once she wounded him as none could wound him now. But so altered is she from the young bright creature she was, so utterly the light of her eyes and the merry magic of her voice are vanished now, that he could forgive her sarcasms only to see her smile in the old way. Sophie welcomes Hermine cordially, for her mother's sake and her husband's, but it is easy to discover the little woman's dogmas on the point.

“Hermine is pretty, and kind, and bewitching,” she says; “it is impossible not to love her, though I should love her twice as well if she told us the truth openly, or

seemed more serious in her loneliness. A good woman who is separated from her husband can never be happy, or seem to be happy—deny that if you can, Hendy.”

Hermine meets her mother very seldom, in spite of Marie's affectionate advances. It is better so, and perhaps there is more heroism in this apparent coldness than we give her credit for. I know that she loved John as only few women can love.

Carline's deathbed was sudden, and very sad, since she had only Carl and Hermine to weep for her, and even their love and sorrow were bitter reproaches. I can never think of her without regret, for undoubtedly hers was a fine nature, only perverted to evil by the predominance of one passion.

An hour before she died she placed in my hands a gold locket, desiring that it might be laid on her heart and buried

there. I knew it to be one that she had always worn appended to a chain, and it contained a lock of hair, around which were engraved these words—

“Carline from Albrecht.—A Token of Love.”

She was a devout Romanist, and received the last consolations of her Church before dying. Her large fortune went to Hermine and Carl, with the exception of a life pension of thirty pounds a-year to the Professor.

In a lovely valley of the Neckar is a cemetery where the earliest birds of spring and the latest of autumn love to sing—where the chaunt of the vintagers is borne from the hills in balmy breaths—where the shadow and sunshine are ever tempered to

tranquillity—where the snows fall lightly as the footsteps of angels. The words of the English poet whom death called so early in the spring come often to my mind as I linger by the little grave that is dear to us. Truly, “it makes us feel almost in love with death to think that we shall be buried in so sweet a place.”

There are here no grand monumental panegyrics such as those that affect our hearts with their hollow mockery in England. The simple crosses of wood and stone bear the records of affection and faith only—speaking, by a word or wreath of the flower everlasting, the heart’s sublime certainty of that “morning to the tomb’s dark night,” of which none who love can doubt.

To me there is a sweet scripture in this homely, simple God’s Acre of the Germans. The little kneeling angels with folded wings ;

the garden-like graves tended by the hands of love alone; the cheerful flowers and chaplets which are links between the lost and the living; the patient piety of the inscriptions—in all these there is something that makes me love Life better for thinking of the life to come. Humble though they are, they are promptings of that within us which is our higher, though, as yet, our undeveloped being. The present seems none the less good or happy for thinking of that perfected future.

Our darling's grave is always spring-like with flowers cultivated and touched by none but those who love her. We do not shun the place, or teach the children to shun it; they bring their garden tools on summer evenings, and prattle tenderly, over their work, of little Mariele who went to heaven. At the head of the grave stands a small

white cross ever garlanded with flowers,
beneath which may be read the words,

AUF WIEDERSEHEN,

and no more. What more is needed?

She shall not return to us, but we shall
go to her. We sorrow, but not as those who
have no hope.

THE END.



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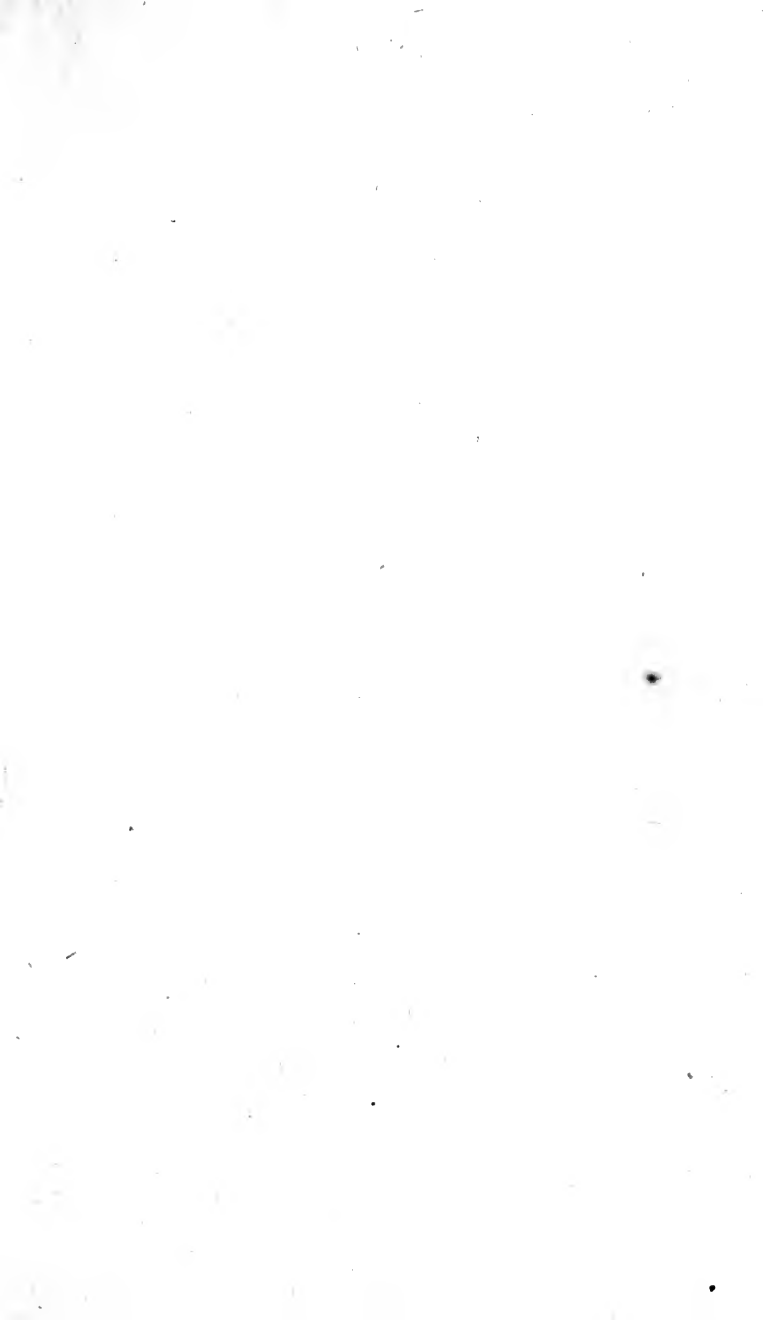
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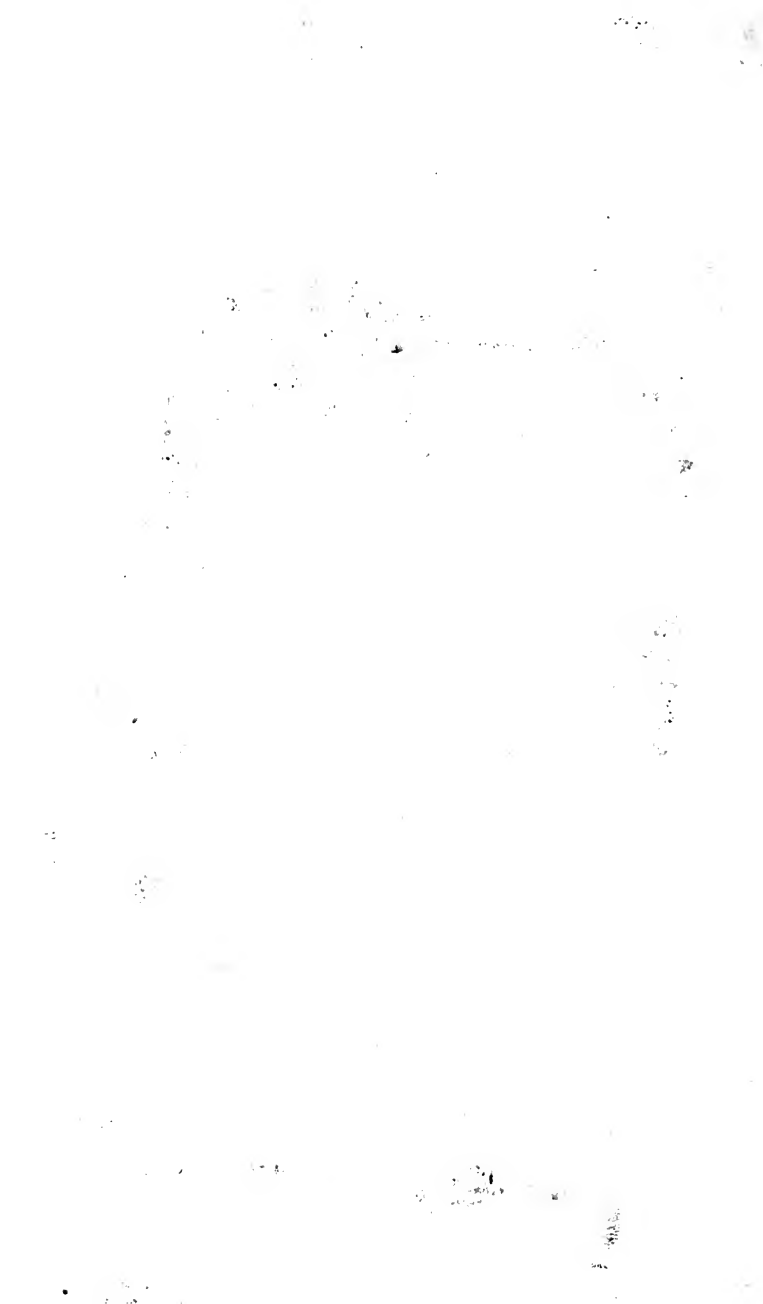
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